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THE SEVEN YEAR ITCH

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A Romantic Comedy

BY

GEORGE AXELROD



WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD
MELBOURNE :: LONDON :: TORONTO

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FOR GLORIA
AND
PETER AND STEVEN

The Seven Year Itch opened at the Fulton Theatre, New York, on November 20th, 1952, and at the Aldwych Theatre, London, on May 14th, 1953. Both productions were directed by John Gerstad, and designed by Frederick Fox.

The London cast was as follows:

RICHARD SHERMAN	BRIAN REECE
RICKY	BUNNY MAY
HELEN SHERMAN	MARGOT STEVENSON
MISS MORRIS	JILL MELFORD
ELAINE	ISABEL GEORGE
PAT	ANNE PURKISS
MARIE	TONI FROST
THE GIRL	ROSEMARY HARRIS
DR. BRUBAKER	ALEXANDER GAUGE
TOM MACKENZIE	VERNON GREEVES
RICHARD'S VOICE	RONALD WILSON
THE GIRL'S VOICE	ANNE PURKISS

SCENES

ACT I

SCENE ONE. About eight o'clock on a summer evening.

SCENE TWO. Immediately following.

ACT II

SCENE ONE. Evening, the following day.

SCENE TWO. Two hours later.

ACT III

The following morning.

The action of the play takes place in the apartment of the Richard Shermans, in the Gramercy Park section of New York City.

The time is the present.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Richard Sherman (BRIAN REECE) and the Girl
(ROSEMARY HARRIS) in Act I *frontispiece*

Elainè (ISABEL GEORGE) and Richard Sherman
(BRIAN REECE) in Act I *facing page 6*

The Girl (ROSEMARY HARRIS) and Richard
Sherman (BRIAN REECE) in Act III *facing page 54*

Photographs by Houston Rogers

ACT I

SCENE I

The apartment of the RICHARD SHERMANS, about half a block from Gramercy Park in New York City.

We see the foyer, the living-room and the back terrace of a four-room apartment—the parlour floor through—in a remodelled private house.

A flight of stairs on the back wall lead to the ceiling where they stop. In one of the earlier phases of remodelling, this apartment and the one above it were a duplex. But now they are rented separately and the ceiling is boarded up.

A door, also on the back wall, leads to the kitchen. French doors, right open on to the terrace. The terrace, while it increases the rent about thirty dollars a month, is small and rather uninviting. It looks out into the back court and because of the buildings around it you get the feeling of being at the bottom of a well. From the terrace we see some of the skyline of the city and a good deal of the backs of the buildings across the court. On the terrace there is a chaise, a table and a few shrubs.

On the left wall of the living-room are high, sliding doors which lead to the bedrooms and bath. There is a fireplace in the living-room. The whole apartment has a summer look. The rugs are up and the summer slip covers are on the furniture. The living-room contains a piano, bookshelves, a large radio phonograph and a liquor cabinet.

When the curtain rises it is about eight o'clock on an evening in July. It is a hot, airless night. It is not yet completely dark. It grows darker gradually through the scene.

RICHARD SHERMAN, a young-looking man of thirty-eight, is lying on the chaise on the terrace. He wears a shirt, gabardine trousers, loafers and no socks.

It is hard to know what to say about RICHARD. He has a crew

hair-cut. He has a good job. He's vice-president in charge of sales at a twenty-five-cent publishing house. He made eighteen thousand dollars last year. He buys his clothes at Brooks.

At the moment, he has moved a small, portable radio out to the table on the terrace and is listening to the first game of a two-night double header between Brooklyn and Boston. He is listening to the game and drinking unenthusiastically from a bottle of Seven-Up.

At rise we hear the ball game softly on the radio. We have come in at a rather tense moment. The bases are loaded and Hodges is up. He bunts and is thrown out. RICHARD is disgusted. He snaps off the radio.

RICHARD (*rising*): Bunt? Two runs behind, the bases loaded and they send Hodges up to hunt!

Shaking his head, he goes into the kitchen. He reappears carrying a bottle of raspberry soda. Still appalled.

Bunt, for God's sake! Well, what are you going to do?

He looks around aimlessly for a moment.

I'm hungry. Well, that's what comes of having dinner at Schrafft's! Schrafft's! I wanted to have dinner in the saloon across the street—but you can't have dinner in a saloon and then not. . . . They don't like it. Oh, I suppose I could have ordered a drink and then not drunk it. . . . But I figure it's easier just to eat at Schrafft's.

He drops wearily on to the chaise.

It's hard on a man when the family goes away. It's peaceful, though, with everybody gone. It's sure as hell peaceful.

He settles back in the chaise and grins. Music sneaks in very softly, and the light on him dims to a spot.

Ricky was really upset this morning when they left for the station. It was very flattering. I thought the kid was going to cry. . . .

He sits, smiling, remembering the scene. Dream lighting by the front door picks up HELEN and RICKY leaving.

RICKY: But what about Daddy? Isn't Daddy coming with us?

HELEN: Daddy'll come up Friday night.

RICKY: But, Mommy, why can't Daddy come up with us now?

HELEN: Poor Daddy has to stay in the hot city and make money. We're going to spend the whole summer at the beach but poor Daddy can only come up week-ends.

RICKY: Poor Daddy . . .

HELEN: Daddy is going to work very hard. He's going to eat properly and not smoke like Dr. Murphy told him and he's going to stay on the wagon for a while like Dr. Summers told him, to take care of his nervous indigestion. . . .

In the spot, RICHARD drinks from the bottle of raspberry soda. He is somewhat awed by the taste. He looks curiously at the label and then reads it.

RICHARD: "Contains carbonated water, citric acid, corn syrup, artificial raspberry flavouring, pure vegetable colours and preservative." Since I've been on the wagon, I've had one continuous upset stomach.

He looks sadly at the bottle and drinks some more.

HELEN: And just to make sure Daddy's all right, Mommy is going to call Daddy at ten o'clock tonight. . . .

RICKY: Poor Daddy . . .

The music fades and so does the dream light by the door. HELEN and RICKY disappear. The lighting returns to normal.

RICHARD (*coming out of his reverie*): Ten o'clock! I don't even know how I'm going to stay awake till ten o'clock!

He stares moodily off into the growing dusk. Suddenly he notices something in an apartment across the court. He is momentarily fascinated and rises for a better look.

Hey, lady! I know it's a hot night but . . . You sit out on this terrace, it's like having a television set with about thirty channels all going at once. . . . Don't give me any dirty look, lady. I pay rent for this terrace. If you don't like it, pull your blind down! (*As she apparently does so.*) Oh. Well, that's life.

He yawns. Restlessly, he rises and wanders into the living-room.

He yawns again and then, suddenly, in mid-yawn, something occurs to him.

Helen has a lot of nerve calling me at ten o'clock. It shows a very definite lack of trust.

What's she think I'm going to do? Start smoking the minute,

she turns her back? Start drinking? Maybe she thinks I'm going to have girls up here!

You know, that's a hell of a thing!

Seven years, we've been married. And not once have I done anything like that. Not *once!* And don't think I couldn't have, either. Because I could have. But plenty . . .

Music sneaks in and in dream lighting we see HELEN seated on the couch knitting. She laughs.

Don't laugh. There's plenty of women who think I'm *pretty* attractive, for your information!

HELEN: For instance, who?

RICHARD (*indignant*): What do you mean, for instance, who? There've been plenty of them, that's all.

HELEN: Name one.

There is a considerable pause while he thinks about this.

Go ahead. Just one.

RICHARD: It's hard, I mean just off-hand. There's plenty of them, though.

HELEN *laughs*. RICHARD *is stung*.

Well, there's Miss Morris, for instance. She's practically thrown herself at me. You should see the way she gives me the business every time she comes into my office. . . .

MISS MORRIS, *a sexy-looking blonde in a backless summer blouse and a skirt with an exaggerated slit, drifts into the scene carrying a dictation pad and pencil.*

She wears those backless things and she's always telling me it's so hot she's not wearing any underwear. . . .

HELEN: It sounds perfectly sordid. Does she sit on your lap when she takes dictation?

RICHARD: Of course not!

MISS MORRIS *sits on his lap*.

MISS MORRIS: Good morning, Mr. Sherman.

RICHARD: Good morning, Miss Morris.

MISS MORRIS *runs her fingers through his hair and covers his cheek and neck with little kisses.*

That will be all.

MISS MORRIS *gets up and drifts away, giving him a private wave and a wink.*

I just happened to bring her up as an example, that's all. Just an example . . .

HELEN: I'm quite sure you're a great success with the stenographers in your office.

RICHARD: I could be a great success with a couple of your high-class friends if you're going to get snooty about it. Elaine, for instance. You may not know this, but for *two years* that dame has been trying to get me into the sack. . . .

ELAINE, *a luscious-looking dame in a gold-lamé evening gown, appears on the terrace. She is carrying a glass of champagne.*

The night of your birthday party, she got loaded and went after me right here on the terrace. . . .

Dream lighting on HELEN dims out.

ELAINE (*coming up behind him and draping her arms around his neck*): Do you know something, darling? I look at you and I just melt. You must know that. Men always know. . . .

Quite casually she tosses her champagne glass off the terrace and grabs him and kisses him violently.

RICHARD: What's the matter? Are you crazy or something?

ELAINE: Let's get out of here, darling. Come on. Nobody'll even know we're gone. . . .

RICHARD: You don't know what you're saying!

ELAINE: Oh, yes, I do! Come on, darling! Let's be a little mad!
She drifts away, giving him the eye as she goes.

RICHARD: Now, Elaine may be a little mad, but she's plenty attractive! And *she's* not the only one either! You probably don't even remember that Marie whatever-her-name-was, from the UN who was staying with the Petersons in Westport last summer. . . .

We went swimming together one night. Without any bathing suits. You didn't know that, did you? It was that Saturday night the MacKenzies came up and I drove over to the beach by myself . . .

MARIE WHAT-EVER-HER-NAME-WAS *has materialised beside him. A gorgeous girl in shorts and man's shirt.*

MARIE (*speaking in rapid but somehow sexy-sounding French*): Hello, Dick. You too, without doubt, like to swim at night. I like it because the wearing of a bathing suit is unnecessary. . . .

She kicks off her shorts and as she talks begins to unbutton her shirt.

RICHARD: I don't speak very good French, but I knew what she was talking about.

MARIE: The water at night is magnificent. There is a warmth and a feeling of black velvet. Especially when one is without bathing costume . . .

RICHARD (*weakly, unable to take his eyes off the buttons*): Mais oui. Mais oui.

MARIE: Voilà! Let us go!

Her shirt is almost off. The lights dim out just in time.

RICHARD (*with great self-righteousness*): We didn't do anything but swim. As a matter of fact, she was plenty disappointed we didn't do anything but swim.

The lights have dimmed back to normal.

So, all I can say is, in the light of the circumstances, I resent your calling me at ten o'clock to check up on me. If Helen is going to start worrying about me after seven years, it's pretty ridiculous, that's all.

He rises and begins to pace nervously.

And she is worried too. Even if she doesn't show it. I don't know. She probably figures she isn't as young as she used to be. She's thirty-one years old. One of these days she's going to wake up and find her looks are gone. Then where will she be? No wonder she's worried.

Especially since I don't look a bit different than I did when I was twenty-eight.

It's not my fault I don't. It's just a simple biological fact. Women age quicker than men. I probably won't look any different when I'm sixty. I have that kind of a face. Everybody'll think she's my mother.

He sighs a mournful sigh and sinks into chair. The downstairs door buzzer rings.

Now who's that? (*He goes to the foyer and presses the wall buttons. Then he opens the front door and peers out calling.*)

Hello? Hello? Who is it?

GIRL'S VOICE (*off stage*): I'm terribly sorry to bother you . . .

RICHARD: What?

Then as he sees her, he reacts.

Oh. Oh. Well, hello . . .

GIRL'S VOICE (*off stage*): I feel so silly. I forgot my key. I locked myself out. So I pressed your bell. I hope you don't mind.

RICHARD: No. No. I don't mind. No trouble at all.

GIRL'S VOICE (*off stage*): I'm awfully sorry.

RICHARD: Don't worry about it. Any time. It's a pleasure.

GIRL'S VOICE (*off stage*): Thank you. Well, good-bye . . .

RICHARD: Good-bye . . .

He closes the door. Then, after a moment opens it again and peers out, craning his neck to see up the stairs. He comes back inside, closes the door. He is shaking his head.

RICHARD: Where did *that* come from? I didn't know they made them like that any more. Oh, she must be the one who sublet the Kaufman's apartment. I should have asked her in for a drink. Oh, no, I shouldn't have. Not me, kid.

The telephone rings. RICHARD glances at his watch. Then hurries to answer it.

Hello? Oh. Hello, Helen. I wasn't expecting you to call till ten. Is everything okay? . . . Good. . . . I was just sitting here listening to the ball game. They're two runs behind and they send Hodges up to bunt. . . . Yeah, I'm sleepy too. . . . The old place is pretty empty without you. I can't wait till Friday. Ricky okay? . . . He did? Well, he hasn't done that for a long time. It was probably just the excitement. . . .

That's nice. No, I don't. . . . Who did you meet at the Meat Market?

What's Tom MacKenzie doing up there? . . . Look, my advice to you is avoid Tom MacKenzie like the plague. If you keep meeting him at the Meat Market, turn vegetarian.

Look, are you sure everything else is all right? Good. . . . Me too. Yeah, I'm pretty tired myself. Good-night. . . . Night.

He hangs up phone.

Well, I might as well go to sleep myself. But I'm not sleepy. I suddenly realise I am not even a little bit sleepy. Maybe I could call up Charlie Peterson. No. That's a real bad idea. Under no circumstances should I call up Charlie Peterson.

I'll get in bed and read. God knows I've got enough stuff here I'm supposed to read.

Picks up brief-case and begins to take out manuscripts.

I've got a conference with Dr. Brubaker tomorrow night. It might be amusing if I'd finished his miserable book before I talk to him about it. I don't know why every psychiatrist in America feels he has to write a book. And let's see what else. *The Scarlet Letter*. I read that in school. I don't have to read that again. But I'd better. Dr. Brubaker and *The Scarlet Letter*. It looks like a big night. (*Picks up soda bottle, notices that it is empty.*) Well, one more of these for a night cap and we're all set. . . .

Sighing heavily, he goes to kitchen for a fresh bottle of soda. He walks back out to the terrace and sits for a moment on the chaise.

Automatically, he switches on the radio.

RADIO VOICE: . . . and so as we go into the last half of the eighth inning, Boston is leading, seven to four. In the last of the eighth, for Brooklyn, it'll be Robinson, Hodges and Furillo . . .

RICHARD (*reaches over and snaps off the radio*);
Frankly, I don't give a damn.

He rises and walks to the edge of the terrace, looking hopefully towards the apartment across the court.

At that moment there is a violent crash. Apparently from the sky, an enormous iron pot with a plant in it comes plummeting down. It lands with a sickening thud on the chaise where he was sitting a moment before.

RICHARD *looks at it in horror-struck silence for a moment or two.*

RICHARD: Look at that damn thing! Right where I was sitting! I could have been killed, for God's sake!

Cautiously, with a nervous glance upwards, he leans over to examine it.

Jes-sus!

He darts back inside, looks wildly around for a cigarette, finally finds a crumbled packet in the pocket of a raincoat hanging in the hall closet. He starts to light it. Then, stops himself.

I forgot—I'm not smoking. Oh, the hell with *that!*

He lights the cigarette.

I could have been killed. Just then. Like that. Right now I could be lying out there on the lousy terrace dead. I should stop smoking because twenty years from now it might affect my goddamn lungs!

He inhales deeply with great enjoyment.

Oh, that tastes beautiful. The first one in six weeks.

He lets the smoke out slowly.

All those lovely injurious tars and resins!

Suddenly he is dizzy.

I'm dizzy. . . .

He sinks to the piano bench, coughing.

Another week of not smoking and I'd really've been dead!

He picks up the bottle of soda and starts to take a slug of that.

He chokes on it.

The hell with this stuff too!

He goes quickly to liquor cabinet and pours an inch or two of whiskey into a glass and belts it down. Then he mixes another one and carries it on to the terrace. He sets the drink on the table and in a very gingerly fashion tries to pick up the pot. It is real heavy.

My God! This thing weighs a ton! I could have been killed!

Suddenly, his anger finds a direction.

Hey, up there! What's the big deal! You want to kill somebody or something? What do you think you're doing anyway?

GIRL'S VOICE (*from the terrace*): What's the matter?

RICHARD (*yelling*): What's the matter? This goddamn cast-iron chamber pot damn near killed me, that's what's the matter. What the hell! . . . Oh. Oh. It's you. Hello.

GIRL'S VOICE: What hap—Oh, golly! The tomato plant fell over!

RICHARD: It sure did.

GIRL'S VOICE: I'm terribly sorry.

RICHARD: That's okay.

GIRL'S VOICE: I seem to be giving you a terrible time tonight. First the door and now this. I don't know what to do. . . .

RICHARD: Don't worry about it. (*He drains drink.*) Hey, up there!

GIRL'S VOICE: Yes?

RICHARD: I'll tell you what you can do about it. You can come down and have a drink.

GIRL'S VOICE: But that doesn't seem . . .

RICHARD: Sure it seems . . . Come on now . . . I insist . . .

GIRL'S VOICE: Well, all right . . .

RICHARD: I'll see you in a minute.

GIRL'S VOICE: All right. I'm really terribly sorry. . . .

RICHARD: That's okay. Don't worry about it. As a matter of fact, it's wonderful. See you in a minute . . .

GIRL'S VOICE: All right . . .

RICHARD *gallops frantically into the living-room. The sound of the telephone brings him up short. He goes quickly to phone and answers it.*

RICHARD: Hi there! Oh. Oh, Helen!

With great, if somewhat forced enthusiasm.

Well, Helen! This *is* a surprise! And a very pleasant one if I may say so! How *are you?*

Sure, sure I'm all right. Why shouldn't I be all right? In what way do I sound funny? I was just out on the terrace listening to the ball game. They're two runs behind and they send Hodges up to bunt. . . . What? Sure . . . Sure I will. Your yellow skirt . . .

As she talks on the other end of the phone he is reaching around straightening up the room.

Yes, of course I'm listening to you. You want me to send up your yellow skirt, because you're having Tom MacKenzie and some people over for cocktails. Good old Tom! How is he?

No. I haven't been drinking. I just had . . . What? Your yellow skirt. In the hall closet. On a wire hanger. Sure. By parcel post. The first thing in the morning. Without fail.

No. I don't feel a bit funny. I was just out on the terrace listening to the ball game. They're two runs behind and they

send Hodges up . . . Yes . . . well, good-night. Good-night. Night.

He hangs up phone. Then, galvanised into action, he starts to straighten up the place. In the middle of this he realises he looks a little soppy himself and he dashes off through the bedroom doors. Music swells and the lights dim out.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

The music continues through the blackout.

After a moment the curtain rises and the lights dim back up to normal.

RICHARD *reappears from the bedroom. He has put on the jacket to his trousers and is frantically tying his tie.*

He is visibly agitated. He starts to arrange the room for his guest. He pauses and turns off a lamp. Catches himself and quickly turns it back on again.

RICHARD: What am I *doing* anyway!

This is absolutely ridiculous. The first night Helen leaves and I'm bringing dames into the apartment.

Now take it easy. The girl upstairs damn near kills me with a cast-iron bucket. So I ask her down for a drink. What's wrong with that?

If Helen was here, she'd do the same thing. It's only polite.

And what the hell is she doing asking Tom MacKenzie over for cocktails, for God's sake!

Besides, I want to get another look at that girl. She must be some kind of a model or actress or something.

He is busily arranging things. Laying out ice and soda. Puffing cushions. Picking up his socks.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with asking a neighbour down for a drink. Nothing.

I just hope *she* doesn't get the wrong idea, that's all. If this

dame thinks she's coming down here for some kind of a big time or something—well, she's got a big surprise. One drink and out! That's all! I'm a happily married man, for God's sake!

He surveys his work.

Maybe we ought to have a little soft music, just for atmosphere.

He goes to gramophone and starts looking through records.

Let's see. How about the Second Piano Concerto? Maybe Rachmaninoff would be overdoing it a little. This kid is probably more for old show tunes. . . .

He finds a record: "Just One of Those Things"—it is obviously an old one with a real thirties orchestration. He puts it on and listens to it for a moment or two with great satisfaction.

That's more like it. The old nostalgia. Never misses. . . . Never misses? What am I trying to do? I'll call her and tell her not to come. That's all. Why ask for trouble?

He starts for phone—stops.

I don't even know her phone number. I don't even know her name. What am I doing? And what the hell is she doing? She could have been down here, had her lousy drink, and gone home already!

She's probably getting all fixed up. She'll probably be wearing some kind of a damn evening dress!

Oh, my God! What have I done?

Very quickly he has another drink.

If anything happens, it happens. That's all. It's up to her. She looked kind of sophisticated. She must know what she's doing.

I'm pretty sophisticated myself. At least I used to be. I've been married so damn long I don't remember.

Suddenly, he becomes very polished.

Drink?

Thanks.

He pours himself a drink.

Soda?

A dash.

He toasts.

Cheers.

He leans nonchalantly against the piano. The "real" lighting begins to dim and music: "Just One of Those Things" fades in. The front door lights up and swings majestically open flooding the room with "dream light". He moves towards the door, almost dancing. In this particular flight of fancy he is very suave, very Noel Coward.

The GIRL is standing in the doorway. She is an extraordinarily beautiful girl in her early twenties. She wears an extravagantly glamorous evening gown. There is a wise, half-mocking, half-enticing smile on her face. She looks like nothing so much as a Tabu perfume ad.

THE GIRL: I came.

RICHARD: I'm so glad.

THE GIRL: Didn't you know I'd come?

RICHARD: Of course. Of course I knew. Won't you come in?

THE GIRL: Thank you.

She comes in. The door swings closed behind her. RICHARD turns and we suddenly notice that he is wearing a black patch over one eye.

RICHARD: How lovely you are! Tell me, who are you? What is your name?

THE GIRL: Does it matter?

RICHARD: No. Of course not. I was a boor to ask.

THE GIRL: Why have you invited me here?

RICHARD (*spoken—like dialogue*): Oh, it was just one of those things. Just one of those foolish things. A trip to the moon—on gossamer wings . . .

THE GIRL: How sweet! Oh—a Steinway. Do you play?

RICHARD (*somewhat wistfully. Thinking, perhaps, of other, happier days.*

Just a little now—for myself . . .

THE GIRL: Play something for me. . . .

RICHARD: All right. You'll be sorry you asked. . . .

THE GIRL: I'm sure I'll not . . .

RICHARD (*sitting at piano*): You'll see . . .

Very dramatically he prepares to play. His preparations, while vastly complicated, do not, however, include raising the lid from the

keys. Finally he begins to play—or rather pantomime playing on the closed lid. We hear, however, the opening bars of the C Sharp Minor Prelude played brilliantly.

RICHARD (*playing*): I'm afraid I'm a little rusty.

* *She is overcome. She sinks to the piano bench beside him. He turns to her.*

Tell me, what would you think if, quite suddenly, I were to seize you in my arms and cover your neck with kisses?

THE GIRL: I would think: What a mad impetuous fool he is!

RICHARD: And if I merely continued to sit here, mooning at you, as I have done for the last half hour—what would you think then?

THE GIRL: I would simply think: What a fool he is!

RICHARD *takes her dramatically in his arms. They embrace. He kisses her violently. Music sweeps in and the lights black out.*

In the darkness, we hear the sound of the door buzzer. It rings twice.

The lights dim back to normal. RICHARD is standing where we left him, leaning against the piano, lost in reverie. The buzzer rings again and he is jarred back to reality. He puts down his drink, and falling all over himself in nervous and undignified haste dashes to the door.

RICHARD: Come in . . . Come in . . .

Revealed in the doorway is DR. BRUBAKER. He is a round, somewhat messy, imperious man in his middle fifties. He carries a large brief case.

RICHARD (*completely taken aback*): Dr. Brubaker!

DR. BRUBAKER: Good evening. I hope I'm not late. Monday is my day at the clinic plus my regular patients and of course I'm on The Author Meets the Critic Friday night. I have been preparing my denunciation. I hope I haven't kept you waiting. . . .

RICHARD: Look, Dr. Brubaker. Wasn't our . . . ?

DR. BRUBAKER: Your office sent me the galleys of the last five chapters. I have them here with me. They are a mass of errors. I want to go over the whole thing with you very carefully.

RICHARD: Dr. Brubaker. I'm terribly sorry. Our appointment—I believe it was for tomorrow night. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER *has opened his brief-case and has begun to spread papers all over the table.*

DR. BRUBAKER: I understand, of course, that your firm wishes to reach as wide an audience as possible. But I must protest—and very strongly—the changing of the title of my book from *Of Man and the Unconscious* to *Of Sex and Violence*. . . .

RICHARD: Dr. Brubaker, I'm terribly sorry. I know how important this is. But I'm afraid our appointment was for tomorrow night.

DR. BRUBAKER: Tomorrow night?

RICHARD: Tuesday night. I understood it was definite for Tuesday night.

DR. BRUBAKER: Good Lord!

RICHARD: And I'm afraid I have someone coming in tonight. Another appointment. With an author. And she'll be here any minute. In fact she's late.

DR. BRUBAKER: Astounding. Really incredible.

RICHARD: It's probably my fault. I probably wasn't clear on the phone.

DR. BRUBAKER: No. No. You were perfectly clear. . . .

RICHARD: I can't understand how it happened.

DR. BRUBAKER: Perfectly simple. Repressed uxoricide.

RICHARD: I beg your pardon?

DR. BRUBAKER: Repressed uxoricide. I came tonight because I want to murder my wife.

RICHARD: I see. . . . Yes Of course

DR. BRUBAKER: A perfectly natural phenomenon. It happens every day.

RICHARD: It does?

DR. BRUBAKER: Certainly. Upon leaving the clinic and being faced with the necessity of returning to my home, I felt a strong unconscious impulse to murder my wife. Naturally, not wanting to do the good woman any bodily harm, my mind conveniently ~~changed~~ our appointment to tonight. What could be more simple?

RICHARD: I see. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: I am most sorry to have inconvenienced you, sir. . . .

RICHARD: No, no. That's quite all right. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: And I shall see you here tomorrow evening.

RICHARD: Fine, Doctor. We could just as easily have our conference tonight—except that I do have this other author coming. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: Of course. I understand perfectly. Oh . . . Have you finished reading the book?

RICHARD: Well, I got as far as Chapter Three. The Meyer-holt Case.

DR. BRUBAKER: Meyerheim. You read very slowly. Well, sir. Good-night.

He turns and starts to go. He is almost to the door when he stops and turns back.

Sir. I trust you will not be offended if I call to your attention the fact that you are not wearing socks. . . .

RICHARD (*looking down*): Good Lord!

DR. BRUBAKER: I was interested in knowing if you were aware of it? And I gather from your expression that you were not. In Chapter Three on Gustav Meyerheim I point out that he invariably removed his socks. Before he struck.

RICHARD: Before—he *struck*?

DR. BRUBAKER: Yes. Surely you recall Meyerheim. A fascinating character! A rapist! I was certain you would be amused by the coincidence. Until tomorrow then, good evening.

The DOCTOR bows and exits.

RICHARD *looks helplessly down at his sockless ankles, then looks wildly around, finds his socks and struggles into them, muttering angrily as he does so something that sounds vaguely like: "Damn psychiatrists—write books—make a Federal case out of everything. . . . I bet his wife is a nervous wreck—every time he takes off his socks she probably hides in the closet. . . ."*

As he is fighting his way into his loafers the door buzzer sounds.

RICHARD: Coming . . .

He dashes to door and opens it. THE GIRL is standing in the doorway. Her real-life entrance is very different from the way he imagined it. She is quite lovely but far from the exotic creature he envisioned. She wears a checked shirt and rolled dungarees. She looks at him for a moment and then smiles tentatively.

THE GIRL: Hi.

RICHARD (*he looks at her blankly for an instant*): Hi.

THE GIRL: Can I come in?

RICHARD: Sure . . . I mean, of course. Please do.

THE GIRL: I'm sorry I took so long but I've been watering the garden. I promised the Kaufmans I'd take good care of it, and I'm afraid I kind of neglected it. I didn't even find the hose until tonight.

RICHARD: I didn't know the Kaufmans had a garden. . . .

THE GIRL: Oh, yes. They do.

RICHARD: It must be very nice.

THE GIRL: It is. But it's a lot of work. Before I found the hose I'd been using the cocktail shaker—that was the only thing I could find. . . .

RICHARD: The cocktail shaker . . .

THE GIRL: Yes. They have a big glass one. It must hold about a gallon. I'm just sick about the tomato plant. Did it survive, do you think?

RICHARD: I really don't know. We could look at it, I suppose. It's out on the terrace. Right where it landed.

THE GIRL: That's awful. . . . I can't figure out how it happened. . . .

RICHARD *leads way to terrace.*

RICHARD: It's right there. I haven't touched it. . . .

THE GIRL: Golly, look at that! I'll pay for it, of course. Do you think you could lift it up . . . ?

RICHARD: Sure.

He lifts the pot off the chaise with a great deal of effort.

This damn thing weighs a ton. . . . There . . .

THE GIRL: I just thought. If you'd been sitting in that chair . . . When it fell, I mean. It might have, well—practically killed you. . . .

RICHARD: That occurred to me, too.

THE GIRL: I'm really awfully sorry. It's probably criminal negligence or manslaughter or something. You could have sued somebody. Me, probably. Or your family could have. Of course I don't know what they would have collected. If they'd sued me, I mean. But anyway, they'd have had a very good case.

RICHARD: There's no use getting all upset. I wasn't sitting there, thank God, so it's all right. Look, I asked you down for a drink. Would you like one? I mean you really don't look old enough to drink. . . .

THE GIRL: I do, though. I drink like a fish. Do you have Scotch?

RICHARD: Sure. At least I'm pretty sure I do. I've been drinking something for the last half hour. I'm not sure now what it was. I was a little upset. . . .

THE GIRL (*following him back into the living-room*): I don't blame you. You could have been killed, practically. I feel just terrible about it. I mean . . .

RICHARD: Let's don't start that again. Let's just have a drink.

THE GIRL: All right. I'm glad you're taking it this way. You have every right to be just furious. I know I would be. If somebody practically dropped a tomato plant on my head.

RICHARD: Let's see, what I *was* drinking?

Picks up glass and tastes it.

Bourbon. But we do have Scotch around here somewhere. Yeah—here we are. How do you like it?

THE GIRL: Scotch and soda, I guess. That's what you're supposed to say, isn't it? Back home the boys drink Scotch and Pepsi-Cola a lot. Before I knew anything at all, I knew *that* was wrong.

RICHARD: That's about as wrong as you can get, yes.

THE GIRL: I knew it was. When I was very young I liked it, though. It sort of killed the taste of the Scotch.

RICHARD (*mixing drink*): I can see how it would ~~ter~~ to do that.

THE GIRL: Do you have a cigarette around? I left mine upstairs.

RICHARD: Oh, yes. Sure. I'm sorry. Right here.

He takes the crumpled pack from his pocket. There is one left in it.

It may be a little stale. I haven't been smoking. In fact, before tonight, I hadn't had a cigarette in six weeks.

THE GIRL: That's wonderful! I wish I had the will-power to stop. I don't, though. I smoke like a chimney. Sometimes three packs a day.

RICHARD: My God! That's terrifying.

THE GIRL: I know. It doesn't seem to affect me, though. I guess I'm pretty healthy. What made you start aga—— Oh. I'll bet you started smoking after the plant fell down. To steady your nerves.

RICHARD: Well, something like that.

THE GIRL: Now I really *do* feel awful. If I'd just had the sense to move it off the wall. Or call the janitor and have him move it. It's pretty heavy. . . . Oh, I just feel . . .

RICHARD: Please, now, that's enough. Let me get some more cigarettes. I think there's an unopened carton out in the kitchen. Excuse me a minute. . . .

He exits into the kitchen.

The GIRL looks around the apartment then drifts over to the piano. She hits a random note or two. RICHARD reappears.

THE GIRL: Do you play the piano?

For one mad instant, RICHARD considers the question. The faraway "Just-a-little-now-for-myself" look comes into his eye. But he quickly suppresses it.

RICHARD (*truthfully*): I'm afraid not. I'm tone deaf. My wife plays, though. . . .

THE GIRL: Oh, you're married?

RICHARD: Yes. I am.

THE GIRL: I knew it! I could tell. You *look* married.

RICHARD: I do?

THE GIRL: Mmm! It's funny. Back home practically nobody was married. And in New York everybody is. Men, I mean.

RICHARD: That's a remarkable observation.

THE GIRL: It's really true.

RICHARD: I guess so. I never really thought about it.

THE GIRL (*as he hands her drink*): Thanks. I think about it quite a lot. This is good. Do you mind if I put my feet up. I'll take my shoes off.

RICHARD: No. Of course not. Go right ahead. Make yourself comfortable.

THE GIRL: Your wife is away for the summer, isn't she?

RICHARD: Yes, as a matter of fact she is. How did you know?

THE GIRL: They all are. It's really amazing.

RICHARD: They *all* are?

THE GIRL: Mmm. Everybody's wife. Back home practically nobody goes away for the summer. Especially anybody's wife.

RICHARD: Have you been away long? In New York, that is?

THE GIRL: Oh, years. Almost a year and a half. It seems like years. I love it. Especially now that I've got my own apartment. When I lived at the club I didn't like it so much. You had to be in by one o'clock. Now I can stay out all night if I want to. I was really glad when they practically asked me to leave.

RICHARD: Why did they practically ask you to leave?

THE GIRL: It was so silly. I used to do modelling when I first came to New York and when this picture of me was published in *US Camera* they got all upset. You should have seen Miss Stephenson's face. She was the house mother.

RICHARD: What was the matter with the picture?

THE GIRL: I was nude.

RICHARD: Oh.

THE GIRL: On the beach with some driftwood. It got honourable mention. It was called "Textures". Because you could see the three different textures. The driftwood, the sand and me. I got twenty-five dollars an hour. And it took hours and hours, you'd be surprised. And the first day the sun wasn't right and I got paid for that too.

RICHARD: That seems only fair.

THE GIRL: Sure. You get paid from the time you're called.

No matter how long it takes to make the picture. But I don't do modelling any more. Since I got this steady job . . .

RICHARD: Now you have a steady job?

THE GIRL: I take in washing. . . .

RICHARD: What?

THE GIRL: That's just a joke. I'm on this television programme. The commercial part. First I wash my husband's shirt in *ordinary* soap flakes. Then I wash it with Trill. So when people ask me what I do I always say I take in washing. I'm on for a minute and forty-five seconds. It's really a very good part. . . .

RICHARD: Oh, so you're an actress. Is that it?

THE GIRL: Mmm. It's really very interesting. People don't realise, but every time I wash a shirt on television, I'm appearing before more people than Sarah Bernhardt appeared before in her whole career. It's something to think about.

RICHARD: It certainly is.

THE GIRL: I wish I were old enough to have seen Sarah Bernhardt. Was she magnificent?

RICHARD is somewhat shaken by this question. For a moment he sits there, grinning weakly.

RICHARD: I really wouldn't know. I'm not quite that old myself. . . .

THE GIRL: I guess you're really not, are you?

RICHARD: I am thirty-nine. Or I will be the day after tomorrow. At the moment I'm still only thirty-eight.

THE GIRL: The day after tomorrow?

RICHARD: That's right.

THE GIRL: Isn't that amazing? We were born under the same sign. I was twenty-two yesterday. I didn't do anything about it, though. I didn't even tell anyone. Oh, I did one thing. I bought a bottle of champagne. I thought I'd sit there and drink it all by myself. . . .

RICHARD: That sounds absolutely sad . . .

THE GIRL: Oh, no. It would have been fun. Sitting in my own apartment drinking champagne. But I couldn't get the bottle open. You're not supposed to use a corkscrew. You're

supposed to work the cork loose with your thumbs. I just couldn't seem to do it. I suppose I could have called the janitor or something. But, somehow, I didn't feel like calling the janitor to open a bottle of champagne on my birthday. Look, I got blisters on both thumbs. Well, not really blisters, but I sort of pulled the thumb part away from the nail . . .

RICHARD: It's not really a matter of brute force. It's more of a trick. (*Demonstrating with thumbs.*) You kind of get one side and-then the other and it finally works loose. . . . You have to have strong thumbs, though. . . .

THE GIRL: I've got a wonderful idea. Let me go up and get it. It's just sitting there in the ice-box. We could both drink it. Since we both have birthdays. If you can really get it open . . .

RICHARD: I'm pretty sure I could get it open—but I don't want to drink your . . .

THE GIRL: It would be fun. After I couldn't get it open I sort of lost interest in sitting up there and drinking it alone. Let me go up and get it and we'll have a double birthday party. It's very good champagne, the man said.

RICHARD: I don't really think . . .

THE GIRL: I told him to be sure and give me very good champagne. Because I couldn't tell the difference myself. Wouldn't you like to?

RICHARD: Sure. As a matter of fact, I'd love to. I think we've got some champagne glasses in the kitchen . . .

THE GIRL: Okay. I'll go up and get it. I'll be right back. Should I bring the potato chips too?

RICHARD: Sure. Let's shoot the works!

THE GIRL: That's just the way I felt. I'll be right back.

RICHARD: Okay.

THE GIRL: See you in a minute . . .

She exits, closing the door behind her.

RICHARD *stares after her, somewhat bewildered. He picks up his glass, drains it, shakes his head, picks up her glass and starts towards the kitchen. Suddenly, he stops and turns back, a reflective expression on his face.*

RICHARD: *US Camera* . . .

He puts down the glasses and goes to the bookshelf. He looks for a moment and then finds what he is looking for. He takes down a book. It is a very large book, very clearly marked: US Camera. He begins, in a casual way, to riffle through the pages.

Muttering:

News events . . . Children and Animals . . . The Human Body . . .

He turns the pages slowly and then suddenly stops. He stares. He closes the book, puts it back on the shelf, picks up the glasses and goes swiftly into the kitchen. After a moment he comes back again, carrying two champagne glasses. He polishes them, sets them down, starts for the book and stops himself. Instead he pours a little whiskey into one of the champagne glasses, gulps it down, then wipes it out with his handkerchief. Finally he pulls himself together.

Let's see . . . Birthday party!

He starts to fix things up a little bit. Goes to gramophone and looks through records.

Show tunes . . .

He puts on a record: "Falling in Love with Love".

In seven years I never did anything like this! In another seven years I won't be able to.

On this sobering thought, he sits down and stares moodily into space—the music from the record fades softly down.

HIS VOICE: Hey, Dick. Dickie boy . . .

RICHARD: Yeah, Richard?

HIS VOICE: What do you think you're doing?

RICHARD: I don't know. I don't know what I'm doing.

HIS VOICE: This kid is just a little young, don't you think?

RICHARD: Look, let me alone, will you?

HIS VOICE: Okay. You know what you're doing.

RICHARD: No, I don't. I really don't.

HIS VOICE: Relax. You're not doing anything. Even if you wanted to—you haven't got a chance. . . .

RICHARD: Oh yeah? That's what you think. She seems to like me. She seems kind of fascinated by me.

HIS VOICE: She thinks you're that nice Sarah Bernhardt fan

who lives downstairs. You're getting older, boy. You got bags under your eyes. You're getting fat.

RICHARD: Fat? Where?

HIS VOICE: Under your chin there. You're getting a martini pouch. And that crew-cut stuff! You're not kidding anybody. One of these mornings you're going to look in the mirror and that's all, brother. The Portrait of Dorian Gray.

RICHARD *examines himself nervously in the mirror. He is only slightly reassured.*

RICHARD: Look, pal, I'm going to level with you. This is a real pretty girl—and, as we pointed out, I'm not getting any younger—so . . .

HIS VOICE: Okay, pal. You're on your own . . .

He stands there for a moment of nervous indecision. The buzzer sounds. He decides—and with a new briskness in his step heads gaily for the door. He opens the door, admitting the girl. She comes in. She has changed to a sophisticated cocktail dress. She carries champagne and a bag of potato chips.

THE GIRL: Hi. I'm sorry I took so long. I thought I ought to change. I got this dress at Ohrbach's. But I don't think you could tell, could you?

RICHARD: You look lovely.

She reacts slightly, sensing a difference in his tone.

THE GIRL: Thank you. Here's the champagne. You can see where I was working on it. . . .

RICHARD: Let me take a crack at it. (*He takes bottle and begins to thumb cork.*) This is a tough one. . . .

THE GIRL: Should I do anything?

RICHARD: I don't think so. Just stand well back . . .

He struggles with the cork.

THE GIRL: We could call the janitor. He's probably got some kind of an instrument . . .

RICHARD (*through clenched teeth as he struggles*): No—let's—keep—the janitor out of this. . . . Damn it . . . This thing is in here like . . .

THE GIRL: I told you. You can just imagine what I went through. On my birthday and everything.

RICHARD (*he stops to rest*): You know, this is just a lot of damn chi-chi nonsense. They could put a regular cork in this stuff and you could just pull it with a corkscrew. . . .

He attacks it again.

Come on, you stinker!

Hey—I think—watch out—maybe you better get a glass just in case she . . .

The cork finally pops.

Catch it! Catch it!

She catches it.

THE GIRL: Got it! Boy, you sure have powerful thumbs. . . .

RICHARD (*he is rather pleased by this*): I used to play a lot of tennis. . . .

THE GIRL: Do you think it's cold enough? I just had it sitting in the ice box. . . .

RICHARD: It's fine. . . . Well, happy birthday.

THE GIRL: Happy birthday. (*They touch glasses and drink.*) Is it all right? I mean is that how it's supposed to taste. . . ?

RICHARD: That's how.

She takes another tentative taste.

THE GIRL: You know, it's pretty good. I was sort of afraid it would taste like Seven-Up or something. . . .

RICHARD: Hey, I forgot . . .

He leans forward and plants a quick, nervous kiss on her forehead.

Birthday kiss. Happy birthday.

THE GIRL: Thank you. Same to you.

RICHARD: Maybe we ought to have some music or something. Since this is a party . . .

THE GIRL: That's a good idea. . . .

RICHARD: I've got about a million records here. We can probably find something appropriate. Ready for some more?

THE GIRL: Not quite yet. (*RICHARD refills his own glass.*) I've kind of stopped buying records. I mean I didn't have a machine for so long. Now that I've got one again—or anyway the Kaufmans have one—I'm all out of the habit. . . .

RICHARD: Do you like show tunes?

THE GIRL: Sure. Do you have "The King and I"?

RICHARD: I'm afraid I don't. That's a little recent for me. I've got mostly old Rodgers and Hart and Cole Porter and Gershwin. . . How about this one? From "Knickerbocker Holiday".

He is offering a prized possession: The Walter Huston recording of "September Song". He puts it on and they listen for a moment in silence.

THE GIRL: Oh, I love that. I didn't even know it was from a show or anything. I thought it was just a song. . . .

RICHARD: Walter Huston sang it. He had a wooden leg—in the show. You better have some more champagne. It's really very good.

He puts a little more in her glass which is still half full. He refills his own. She takes off her shoes.

THE GIRL: This is pretty nice. . . .

RICHARD: Isn't it? It's a lot better than sitting out there listening to the ball game. Two runs behind and they send Hodges up to bunt!

THE GIRL: Is that bad?

RICHARD: It's awful.

THE GIRL: I didn't know. I was never very good at baseball. I was going to wash my hair tonight. But after I got through with the garden I just didn't feel like it.

RICHARD: I was going to bed and read *Of Sex and Violence* and *The Scarlet Letter*. We're publishing them in the fall and I'm supposed to read them.

THE GIRL: You're a book publisher?

RICHARD: In a way. I'm the advertising manager for a firm called Pocket Classics. Two bits in any drugstore. I'm supposed to figure out a new title for *The Scarlet Letter*. They want something a little catchier. . . .

THE GIRL: I think I read *The Scarlet Letter* in school. . . . I don't remember much about it. . . .

RICHARD: Neither do I. I sent a memo to Mr. Brady—he's the head of the company—advising him not to change the title. But we had the title tested and eighty per cent of the people didn't know what it meant. So we're changing it. . .

He gets up and fills glass again.

Do you know what Mr. Brady wanted to call it?

She shakes her head.

I Was an Adulteress. But he's not going to, thank God. And do you know why? Because we had *it* tested and sixty-three per cent of the people didn't know what *that* meant. I wish you'd drink some more of your champagne. . . .

THE GIRL: No, thanks . . .

She rises and drifts over to the bookcase.

You've certainly got a lot of books. . . .

RICHARD: There're cases more in the closets. . . .

THE GIRL (*suddenly*): Oh! Look! You've got *US Camera!*

RICHARD (*a little flustered*): Do we? I didn't even know it. How about that! *US Camera!*

THE GIRL (*she takes it down*): I bet I bought a dozen copies of this. But I don't have a single one left. Boys and people used to keep stealing 'em. . . .

RICHARD: I can't think why. . . .

THE GIRL: Did you ever notice me in it? It's a picture called "Textures".

RICHARD: I'm afraid I didn't. . . .

THE GIRL: I told you about it, don't you remember? See, that's me, right there on the beach. My hair was a little longer then, did you notice?

RICHARD: No, actually—I didn't. . . .

THE GIRL: And of course I've taken off some weight. I weighed 124 then. Gene Belding—Gene took the picture—used to call it baby fat.

RICHARD: Baby fat?

THE GIRL: Mmm! I'm much thinner now. . . .

They both study the picture for a moment.

RICHARD: This was taken at the beach?

THE GIRL: Mmm . . .

RICHARD: *What beach?*

THE GIRL: Right on Fire Island . . . Oh . . . I see what you mean. It was taken very early in the morning. Nobody was even up yet.

RICHARD: Just you and Miss Belding?

THE GIRL: *Mr. Belding. Gene Belding. With a G. . .*

RICHARD: Oh. Well, it certainly is a fine picture.

THE GIRL: I'll autograph it for you if you want. People keep asking me to . . .

RICHARD (*weakly*): That would be wonderful. . . . Maybe we'd better have some more champagne. . . .

THE GIRL: Good. You know, this is suddenly beginning to feel like a party. . . .

He refills her glass which is only half-empty and fills his own all the way, emptying the bottle.

It was awfully sweet of you to ask me down here in the first place. . . .

He drains his glass of champagne—looks at her for a moment.

RICHARD: Oh, it was just one of those things. Just one of those foolish things. A trip to the moon—on gossamer wings . . . Do you play the piano?

THE GIRL: The piano?

RICHARD: Yeah. Somebody should play the piano. Do you play?

THE GIRL: I really don't. Do you?

RICHARD: Just a little. For myself . . .

THE GIRL: *You play then . . .*

RICHARD: You'll be sorry you asked. . . .

He sits at piano and after a very impressive moment begins to play "Chopsticks". She listens and is delighted.

THE GIRL: Oh! I was afraid you could *really* play. I can play *that* too!

She sits on the bench beside him and they play "Chopsticks" as a duet. When they finish:)

RICHARD: That was lovely. . . .

His manner changes.

Tell me, what would you say if, quite suddenly, I were to seize you in my . . . Hey, come here . . .

He reaches over and takes her in his arms.

THE GIRL: Hey, now wait a minute . . .

For a moment they bounce precariously around on the piano

bench, then RICHARD loses his balance and they both fall off knocking over the bench with a crash and landing in a tangle of arms and legs.

RICHARD (*panic-stricken*): Are you all right? I'm sorry—I don't know what happened—I must be out of my mind. . . .

THE GIRL: I'm fine . . .

RICHARD: I don't know what happened. . . .

THE GIRL: Well, I think I'd better go now. . . .

Putting on her shoes.

RICHARD: Please don't . . . I'm sorry . . .

THE GIRL: I'd better. Good-night . . .

RICHARD: Please . . . I'm so sorry . . .

THE GIRL: That's all right. Good-night.

She goes, closing the door behind her.

RICHARD *looks miserably at the door. Then turns and kicks viciously at the piano bench. He succeeds in injuring his toe. Sadly, still shaking his wounded foot, he limps to the kitchen and reappears a moment later with a bottle of raspberry soda. He goes to the gramophone and puts on "September Song". He listens to it with morbid fascination. In a melancholy voice he joins Mr. Huston in a line or two about what a long, long while it is from May to December. He shakes his head and crosses sadly to the terrace. He stands there—a mournful figure clutching a bottle of raspberry soda.*

As he stand there, a potted geranium comes crashing down from the terrace above and shatters at his feet.

He does not even bother to look around. He merely glances over his shoulder and says

RICHARD (*quietly*): Oh, now, for God's sake, let's not start that again. . . .

THE GIRL'S VOICE (*from above*): Oh, golly! I was just taking them in so there wouldn't be another accident. I'm really sorry. . . . I mean this is awful. . . . I could have practically killed you again. . . .

RICHARD: It doesn't matter. . . .

THE GIRL'S VOICE (*from above*): I'm really sorry. It was an accident. . . . Are you all right. . . ?

RICHARD: I'm fine.

THE GIRL'S VOICE (*from above*): Well, good-night . . .

RICHARD: Good-night . . .

THE GIRL'S VOICE (*from above*): Good-night. See you tomorrow, maybe. . . .

RICHARD: Huh? (*He straightens up.*) Yeah! I'll see you tomorrow!

THE GIRL'S VOICE (*from above*): Good-night!

• *He starts to drink from soda bottle. Stops himself. Puts it down in disgust. Then strides back to living-room with renewed vigour. He goes to the liquor cabinet and begins to pour himself another drink. From the gramophone comes the happy chorus of "September Song".*

RICHARD, *a peculiar expression on his face, sings cheerfully with the record as:*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

SCENE I

The same.

It is early evening the following day. RICHARD, back in full control and very businesslike, is deep in conference with DR. BRUBAKER.

Both are somewhat tense and it is evident that the conference has been proceeding with difficulty. The DOCTOR is seated amid a litter of papers and galley sheets. RICHARD holds a duplicate set of galleys. As the curtain rises RICHARD clears his throat and prepares to renew his attack.

RICHARD: On page one hundred and ten, Doctor, if we could somehow simplify the whole passage . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: Simplify? In what way simplify?

RICHARD: In the sense of making it—well—simpler. Both Mr. Brady and I have gone over it a number of times, and, to be perfectly frank with you, neither of us has any clear idea of what it's actually about . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: Your Mr. Brady, sir, is, if I may also speak with frankness, a moron.

RICHARD: It is Mr. Brady's business, as an editor, to keep the point of view of the average reader very clearly in mind. If something is beyond Mr. Brady's comprehension, he can only assume that it will also be over the head of our readership.

DR. BRUBAKER: It was, I take it, at Mr. Brady's suggestion that the title of my book was changed from *Of Man and the Unconscious* to, and I shudder to say these words aloud, *Of Sex and Violence*. . . .

RICHARD: That is correct. Mr. Brady felt that the new title would have a broader popular appeal.

DR. BRUBAKER: I regret to inform you, sir, that Mr. Brady is a psychopathic inferior. . . .

RICHARD: Cheer up, Doctor. If you think you've got troubles, Mr. Brady wants to change *The Scarlet Letter* to *I Was an Adulteress*. I know it all seems a little odd to you—but Mr. Brady understands the twenty-five-cent book field. Both Mr. Brady and I *want* to publish worthwhile books. Books like yours. Like *The Scarlet Letter*. But you must remember that you and Nathaniel Hawthorne are competing in every drugstore with the basic writings of Mickey Spillane.

As DR. BRUBAKER is unacquainted with this author, RICHARD's bon mot gets no reaction.

DR. BRUBAKER: This is therefore why my book is to be published with a cover depicting Gustav Meyerheim in the very act of attacking one of his victims. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER has picked up a large full-colour painting of the cover of his book which shows in lurid detail a wild-eyed man with a beard attempting to disrobe an already pretty-well disrobed young lady. It also bears the following line of copy: "Hotter Than the Kinsey Report". Both regard the cover for a moment.

RICHARD (*with a certain nervous heartiness*): I must take the responsibility for the cover myself, Doctor. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: And also for making Meyerheim's victim—all of whom incidentally, were middle-aged women—resemble in a number of basic characteristics, Miss Marilyn Monroe?

RICHARD: I'm afraid so, Doctor. Don't you think there would be something just a little bit distasteful about a book jacket showing a man attempting to attack a middle-aged lady?

DR. BRUBAKER: And it is less distasteful if the lady is young and beautiful?

RICHARD: At least, if a man attacks a young and beautiful girl, it seems more . . . Oh, my God!

He remembers last night and shudders.

DR. BRUBAKER: I beg your pardon?

RICHARD: Nothing. Doctor, if you don't like the cover, I'll see if I can have it changed. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: I would be most grateful.

RICHARD: Doctor.

DR. BRUBAKER: Yes?

RICHARD: You say in the book that ninety per cent of the population is in need of some sort of psychiatric help?

DR. BRUBAKER: This is theoretically true. It is not however practical. There is the matter of cost. . . .

RICHARD: With your own patients—are you very expensive?

DR. BRUBAKER (*his Third Ear has caught the direction this conversation is leading and his defences go up immediately*): Very.

RICHARD: I'm sure you occasionally make exceptions. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: Never.

RICHARD: I mean, once in a while a case must come along that really interests you. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER (*primly*): At fifty dollars an hour—all my cases interest me.

RICHARD (*undaunted*): I mean if you should run into something really spectacular. Another Gustav Meyerheim, for example . . . Doctor, tell me frankly. Do you think that I need to be psychoanalysed?

DR. BRUBAKER: Very possibly. I could recommend several very excellent men who might, perhaps, be a little cheaper.

RICHARD: How much cheaper?

DR. BRUBAKER (*considering*): Ohhhhh . . .

RICHARD: I couldn't even afford *that*. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: I thought not. (*He turns back to his papers.*)
Now to get back to . . .

RICHARD (*seating himself casually on the couch*): I wondered if possibly you might give me some advice. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: I know. Everyone wonders that.

Still moving casually, RICHARD swings his feet on to the couch until he is lying in the classic position.

RICHARD: I'm desperate, Doctor. Last night after you left, I was just sitting there listening to the ball game . . .

DR. BRUBAKER (*outmanœuvred, but still game*): This fact in itself is not really sufficient cause to undertake analysis . . .

RICHARD: No, I don't mean that. I *started out* listening to the ball game and do you know what I ended up doing?

DR. BRUBAKER: I have no idea. . . .

RICHARD: I ended up attempting to commit what I guess they call criminal assault. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER (*defeated, he takes a pad and pencil from his pocket*): From the way you phrase it, I assume the attempt was unsuccessful. . . .

RICHARD: Thank God! All I did was knock us both off the piano bench. . . .

A flicker of interest—he begins to write.

You attempted to commit criminal assault on a piano bench?

RICHARD: Yes.

DR. BRUBAKER: And on whose person was this obviously maladroit attempt committed?

RICHARD *rises and goes to bookshelf. Gets US Camera and shows it to DOCTOR.*

RICHARD: That's her. Her hair was a little longer then.

DR. BRUBAKER (*after a moment*): Splendid. I congratulate you on your taste. However, you ask for my advice. I give it to you. Do not attempt it again.

A brief pause while the DOCTOR re-examines the photograph.

If you *should*, however, give yourself plenty of room to work in. In any case do not attempt it precariously balanced on a piano bench. Such an attempt is doomed from the start. Now, my boy, I must go. I have many things to . . .

RICHARD: But look, Doctor—I'm married. I've always been married. Suppose this girl tells people about this. She's likely to mention it to someone. Like my wife.

DR. BRUBAKER: This is, of course, not beyond the realm of possibility. In that event I would recommend a course of vigorous denial. It would be simply your word against hers. Very possibly, if you were convincing enough, you could make it stick. And now I must really go. I thank you for your help. It is agreed that I shall make the necessary clarifications in Chapter Eight and you will devote your best efforts to making the cover of my book look less like a French postal card. I shall be in touch with your office the first of next week. . . .

RICHARD: If she tells anyone about this—I'll, I'll—kill her! I'll kill her with my bare hands!

DR. BRUBAKER (*who has started to leave, turns back*): This is also a possible solution. However, I submit that murder is the most difficult of all crimes to commit successfully. Therefore, until you are able to commit a simple criminal assault, I strongly advise that you avoid anything so complex as murder. One must learn to walk before one can run. I thank you again and good-night.

He exits briskly.

RICHARD *stands blankly staring after the good Doctor. He shakes his head.*

Music sneaks in—he turns and there grouped about the couch and coffee table, in “dream lighting” are HELEN, THE GIRL, MISS MORRIS, ELAINE, MARIE WHATEVER-HER-NAME-WAS and an unidentified YOUNG LADY in brassiere and panties. They all brandish tea cups and in very hen-party fashion are engaged in dishing the dirt about someone. It is, after all, a figment of RICHARD’S imagination, so the cups are raised and lowered in unison and the little clucking noises of disapproval are done in chorus.

THE GIRL (*very chatty*): Actually, Mrs. Sherman, it was terribly embarrassing. He seemed to go berserk. He’d been sitting playing “Chopsticks” when suddenly he grabbed me and practically tried to tear my clothes off. . . .

ELAINE: My dear, the night of your birthday party he made himself perfectly obnoxious right out there on the terrace. I don’t like to say this, but he attempted to take advantage of me.

All the girls shake their heads and make small clucking noises of shocked disapproval.

MISS MORRIS: It’s just terrible, Mrs. Sherman. I’m positively scared to go into his office to take dictation. Why, the way that man looks at me, it makes me feel kinda naked. . . .

All drink tea.

ELAINE: I said, Richard darling, at least have the decency not to try something like this practically in front of poor Helen’s eyes!

THE GIRL: He’d been drinking heavily, of course. . . . He practically guzzled a whole bottle of my champagne. . . .

MARIE (*in French*): Madamel Madamel He was like a human

beast! He tore off my belt, he tore off my skirt, he tore off my pants and he chased me into the sea without a bathing costume.

All shake heads and "Tsk-tsk". Then the unidentified YOUNG LADY in the bra and pants speaks up.

YOUNG LADY: And me! I'm not even safe in my own apartment! Every time I start getting ready for bed that man sits out there on the terrace—staring at me! I just hate a Peeping Tom!

HELEN: I've always suspected that Richard was not quite sane.

THE GIRL: Oh, he's sane, all right. He's just a nasty, evil-minded, middle-aged man. . . .

He can stand it no longer.

RICHARD: Helen! Listen to me. . . .

The girls raise their tea cups and vanish. Music in and out and lighting back to normal.

RICHARD (*in a panic, lights a cigarette*): I've got to do something. That girl's probably told fifty people about this already. If I just sent her some flowers . . . That's no good. . . . I've got to talk to her. Reason with her. Plead with her. Tell her I was drunk, which God knows I was, and beg her not to mention this to anyone or my life could be ruined. . . .

He has found telephone book and is riffling through pages.

Twelve solid pages of Kaufman . . . Here it is . . . ORegon 3-7221.

He lifts receiver, starts to dial, then stops.

I can't do it. What can I possibly say to her?

He practises—holding receiver switch down.

RICHARD (*with great charm*): My dear Miss—I don't even know what the hell her name is—My dear Young Woman—I have simply called to apologise for my absurd behaviour last night. It was inexcusable, but I had been drinking. I can barely remember what happened, but I'm under the impression that I made a terrible fool of myself. I beg you to forgive me and put the whole distasteful incident out of your mind.

Stops and puts down phone.

No good. I can't do it.

And what about Helen? She hasn't called. She's probably heard about it by now. Oh, that's out of the question. How

could she possibly have heard anything? But she could have. The word gets around. It's like jungle drums.

If she hasn't heard anything—why hasn't she called?

I could call her. The minute I heard her voice I could tell if she knew anything.

Come on. Call her.

Stop stalling. Pick up the telephone and call her. It's the only way you'll know.

Okay. Okay.

He picks up the phone and dials the Long-Distance Operator.

Long Distance? I want to call Cohasset. Cohasset, Massachusetts 4-2831-J. Yeah . . . My number? ORegon 9-4437. Thank you.

Okay fasten your seat belts. . . .

Hello? Hello, Helen? Who? Who is this? Look, I want to talk to Mrs. Richard Sherman. Is she there? Who is this anyway? Oh. The baby sitter. Look, this is Mr. Sherman calling from New York. What do you mean she's out for the evening. With whom is she out for the evening? Mr. MacKenzie and some people? *What people?* Well, what *was* the message she left for me?

Oh. Oh, my God. Her yellow skirt. No, no, I didn't. Something unexpected came up. But tell her I will. The first thing in the morning. Without fail.

Look, I want to ask you. How did Mrs. Sherman seem? I mean did she seem upset in anyway? Like she'd heard some bad news or anything like that?

Just about the yellow skirt. Well, good. Tell her I'll send it up the first thing in the morning. Is Ricky all right? Good. When Mrs. Sherman comes in, tell her everything is fine here and I'll talk to her tomorrow. . . . Fine . . . Good-bye . . . Good-bye.

He hangs up phone.

Well, thank God!

He sits down and lights a cigarette.

The only thing I cannot understand is, what the hell is she doing having dinner with Tom MacKenzie. I wish she wouldn't

hang around with people like that. He gets away with murder because he's a writer. Well, he's a damn lousy writer. That last book!

Helen should know better than to go around with people like that. She isn't even safe.

I know for a positive fact that he's been after her for years. Tom MacKenzie happens to be a real bum, if you want to know! And there probably aren't any other people.

She doesn't know what she's getting herself into. She's been married so long she forgets what it's like.

Helen happens to be a damned attractive woman. A man like Tom MacKenzie is perfectly capable of making a pass at her.

By now he has begun to pace the floor.

And don't think she doesn't know what she's doing. She's getting older. She's used to me. In many ways I'm probably very dull. And Tom MacKenzie's a writer. She probably thinks he's fascinating as hell!

She thought that last book of his was great! All that inwardly-downwardly-pulsating-and-afterward-her-hair-spilled-across-the-pillow crap! Strictly for little old ladies at Womrath's.

But Helen is just the kind of middle-aged dame who would fall for it.

Well, good luck! That's all!

Brooding, he sits in easy chair, a grim expression on his face.

Music sneaks in and the "dream lighting" comes up on the far side of the stage by the fireplace. We hear the sound of wind mingled with the music. A door opens and slams shut and TOM MACKENZIE and HELEN enter, laughing. TOM MACKENZIE is a handsome, glamorous-type author with a moustache. He looks quite a lot like his photograph on the book jackets. He wears a tweed coat with the collar up and a hunting shirt. HELEN wears a sweater and skirt with a man's raincoat thrown about her shoulders. Both are very gay.

HELEN (*as he helps her off with raincoat*): It's been years since I took a walk on the beach in the rain. . . .

TOM: I love the rain on the sea. It's so wild and untamed. . . .

HELEN (*looking around*): Where are the other people?

TOM: I have a confession to make.

HELEN: Yes?

TOM: There are no other people. Don't be angry.

HELEN (*after a moment*): I'm not angry.

TOM: I hoped you wouldn't be. Come over here by the fire.

HELEN: I love an open fire.

TOM: I always say, What good is the rain without an open fire?

RICHARD (*from his chair across the room*): Oh, brother!

TOM: Let me get you a little whisky to take out the chill. . . .

HELEN: Thank you . . .

He pours whisky from flask. She drinks, then hands the cup to him. He drinks—but first kisses the spot on the cup where her lips have been.

RICHARD (*muttering scornfully*): H. B. Warner . . .

TOM: But wait. You're shivering. . . .

HELEN: It's nothing. I'll be warm in a moment. . . .

TOM: No, no . . . You're soaked to the skin. You'll catch your death of cold. . . .

RICHARD: Here it comes. . . .

TOM: Why don't you take off your things and hang them by the fire? I'll get you something dry. . . .

RICHARD (*appalled*): He used *that* in his book, for God's sake! As who didn't!

HELEN: All right. Turn your back . . .

He turns his back and she removes her shoes. She takes off her skirt and hangs it on the fire-screen.

TOM: May I turn around now?

HELEN: If you like . . .

Suddenly, the mood has changed. His voice is now husky with passion.

TOM: Helen, darling!

HELEN: Yes, Tom?

TOM: Did anyone ever tell you that you are a very beautiful woman?

HELEN: No. Not recently anyway . . .

TOM: But surely Richard . . .

HELEN: I'm afraid Richard rather takes me for granted now. . . .

TOM: That blind, utter fool!

HELEN: Oh, darling!

TOM: Darling!

The music swells. TOM takes her in his arms.

Murmuring as he covers her with kisses.

Inwardly, downwardly, pulsating, striving, now together, ending and unending, now, now, now!

They are in a full mad clinch as the lights black out.

On his side of the room, RICHARD jumps to his feet and angrily pounds the table.

RICHARD: Okay! If that's the way you want it! Okay!

With great purpose he strides to the telephone. Gets phone book, thumbs through it, finds number and dials. He whistles softly through his teeth. . . . The tune he is whistling might, if he were not tone deaf, almost be "Just One of Those Things". After a moment someone obviously answers the phone.

RICHARD (*with great charm*): Hi. Did you know you left your tomato plant down here last night? I could have the janitor bring it back—or—if you want—I was thinking maybe I could . . .

He is talking into the phone with great animation by the time the lights have dimmed and:

THE CURTAIN IS DOWN

SCENE II

The same. It is later that evening.

The apartment is empty. A single light in the foyer.

After a moment, the sound of a key in the lock and RICHARD and the GIRL enter. He switches on the lights.

RICHARD: Well, we can make it.

THE GIRL: I'm so full of steak I can barely wobble. . . .

RICHARD: Me too.

THE GIRL: I feel wonderful. . . .

RICHARD: Did anyone ever tell you that you have a very, very beautiful digestive tract?

THE GIRL: Yes. But they don't usually say it like that. Mostly they just say: Boy, did you ever stuff yourself!

RICHARD: Would you like a drink or something?

THE GIRL: No, thanks. But you go ahead and have one. Don't mind me . . .

RICHARD: Not me. I'm back on the wagon again. . . .

THE GIRL: This was awfully nice of you. It was enough to have you carry that heavy plant all the way upstairs. You didn't have to ask me out for dinner. I hope you didn't hurt yourself. Or strain something . . .

RICHARD: It wasn't that heavy. I was going to call the janitor to help me, but then I decided not to. . . .

THE GIRL: You're in pretty good shape. . . .

RICHARD: For an old man . . .

THE GIRL: You're not *that* old. You don't look a day over twenty-eight.

RICHARD: I know. . . .

THE GIRL: Anyway it was very nice of you.

RICHARD: I just took a chance and called. I didn't really think you'd be home. You know, I thought you'd be out or something.

THE GIRL: No, I don't go out very much. . . .

RICHARD: That's funny. I should think you'd have a line of suitors half-way round the block. Like Easter show at Radio City . . .

THE GIRL: Last night, I went to the movies by myself. . . .

RICHARD: Last night?

THE GIRL (*diplomatically*): After I left here.

RICHARD (*moving the conversation past a trouble spot*): All by yourself! You must have a boy friend or something. . . .

THE GIRL: I don't go out with most people who ask me. I know it sounds silly but people are always falling desperately in love with me and everything and it makes things so complicated. I mean, it's just easier to pay the fifty-five cents and go to the movies by yourself.

RICHARD: It doesn't sound very exciting. . . .

THE GIRL: It is, though. This is the first time I've had my own apartment and everything.

RICHARD: You went out with me when I asked you. . . .

THE GIRL: Well, that's different. I mean, it's all right going out with you. After all, you're married.

RICHARD: I see. I *think*.

THE GIRL: No. What I mean is, it's all right to have dinner with you because you're not likely to fall desperately in love with me or anything. You're more mature. . . .

RICHARD: I don't feel so—mature. . . .

THE GIRL: Well, you know what I mean.

Pause.

RICHARD: You're absolutely sure you wouldn't like a drink?

THE GIRL: Absolutely.

RICHARD: I think maybe I'll have one. Just a little one.

He goes to bar and fixes himself a drink.

Not even a Coke or something?

THE GIRL: Not right now.

RICHARD: Well, happy birthday.

Pause.

THE GIRL: This certainly is a beautiful apartment.

RICHARD: It's all right. It's a little ridiculous in some ways. . . . The stairs, for instance . . .

THE GIRL: I think they're beautiful. I like an apartment with stairs.

RICHARD: But these don't go any place. They just go up to the ceiling and stop. They give the joint a kind of Jean Paul Sartre quality.

THE GIRL: I see what you mean. No exit. A stairway to nowhere.

RICHARD: I tried to get the landlord to take them out. See, this used to be the bottom half of a duplex. This place and the Kaufmans' were all one apartment. So when he divided them separately he just boarded up the ceiling—or in your case the floor . . .

THE GIRL: Yes, I noticed the place in the floor. I lost an

orange stick down the crack. Anyway, I think the apartment's just charming. . . .

RICHARD: Yeah. But we're moving into a larger place in September. . . .

THE GIRL: Oh, that's too bad. But still, people in New York are always moving. You certainly have a lot of books. The last book I read was *The Catcher in the Rye* . . .

RICHARD: The last book I read was *The Scarlet Letter*. Mr. Brady thinks we can sell it. If we make it sound sexy enough.

THE GIRL: Is it sexy? I don't seem to remember.

RICHARD: No. Actually, it's kind of dull. In fact, people are going to want their quarters back. But Mr. Brady feels we can sell it if I can just figure out a way to tell people what the *Scarlet Letter* is.

THE GIRL: What *is* it?

RICHARD: Well, *The Scarlet Letter* was a big red "A". For Adultery. Anyone who was convicted of adultery had to wear it.

THE GIRL: How awful!

RICHARD: The cover will be a picture of Hester Prynne with a cigarette hanging out of her mouth. She'll be in a real tight, low-cut dress. Our big problem is—if the dress is cut low enough to sell any copies, there won't be any space on the front for a big red letter . . .

THE GIRL: The publishing business sounds fascinating.

RICHARD: Oh, it is. It is.

Pause.

THE GIRL: It's getting late. I really ought to go. . . .

RICHARD: You've got plenty of time.

THE GIRL: I guess so. That's the wonderful thing about having my own apartment. I mean at the club you had to be in at one o'clock or they locked the doors.

RICHARD: It sounds barbaric. . . .

THE GIRL: Oh, it practically was. It was really very funny. I mean, all the girls at the club were actresses. So naturally they were always asking each other what they called the big question. . . .

RICHARD: The big question?

THE GIRL: Mmm! They were always asking each other: Would you sleep with a producer to get a part?

RICHARD: That is a big question. . . .

THE GIRL: But it's so silly. If you live at the club anyway. I used to tell them, producers don't even *go* to bed before one o'clock. So the whole thing is academic, if you see what I mean. You'd be surprised how much time they spent discussing it, though.

RICHARD: I can see where they might give the matter some thought.

THE GIRL: Oh, sure. But they never discussed it in a *practical* way. When they asked me, I always used to say: It depends. How big is the part? Is the producer handsome? Things like that . . .

RICHARD: Practical things . . .

THE GIRL: Mmm! I was at the club for eight months and as far as I know no producer ever mentioned the subject to any of the girls.

RICHARD: That must have been very disappointing for them.

THE GIRL: It was.

RICHARD: But what if he was very handsome? And it was a very good part? And you didn't have to be in by one o'clock? What *would* you do?

THE GIRL: In that case . . . If I was sure he wouldn't fall desperately in love with me and ask me to marry him and everything.

RICHARD: What's so bad about that?

THE GIRL: Oh, that would spoil everything. Marrying him, I mean. It would be worse than living at the club. Then I'd have to start getting in at one o'clock again. I mean it's taken me twenty-two years to get my own apartment. It would be pretty silly if the first thing I did was get married and spoil everything. I mean, I want to have a chance to be independent first. For a few years anyway. You can't imagine how exciting it is to live by yourself—after you've had somebody practically running your life for as long as you can remember. . . . You just can't imagine. . .

As RICHARD stops listening to the GIRL and gradually becomes absorbed in his own thoughts, the lights dim down till there is only a dream spot on RICHARD.

RICHARD: Yes, I can. As a matter of fact we have a great deal in common.

HIS VOICE (*mockingly—imitating HELEN's tone*): Daddy's going to work very hard. And he's going to stay on the wagon, like Dr. Summers told him. And he's going to eat properly and not smoke, like Dr. Murphy told him. And Mommy is going to call Daddy tonight just to make sure he's all right . . .

Poor Daddy!

RICHARD: Poor Daddy!

HIS VOICE: The girl is absolutely right. Not want to get married. You—you dope. The minute you were old enough to have any fun—the only thing you could think of to do was to get married.

RICHARD: I know. I know. It was a kind of nervousness. But I made the best of it. I've been a pretty good husband. When I think of the chances I've had . . .

HIS VOICE: We've been through all this before. . . .

RICHARD: I know. I know. I just thought I'd mention it.

HIS VOICE: Has it ever dawned on you that you're kidding yourself?

RICHARD: What do you mean by that?

HIS VOICE: All those dames you could have had if you weren't such a noble husband. The only reason you didn't do anything about 'em is that you didn't want to. . . .

RICHARD: Why didn't I want to?

HIS VOICE: Laziness, pal. Laziness. It was too much trouble. You just didn't want to get involved. Elaine, for instance. It would have taken six months. And all those phone calls and taxis and excuses.

RICHARD: Yeah. (*Pause.*) Why does it always have to be so complicated?

HIS VOICE: If you could answer that one, pal-pal, they'd make you President of the United States.

RICHARD *sighs and the lights dim back to normal.* The GIRL

is still speaking, unaware of the fact that his mind has been far away.

THE GIRL: . . . so when you asked me to go out for dinner with you it was all right. You're married and naturally, you don't want to fall desperately in love with anyone any more than I want anyone to fall desperately in love with me. Do you know what I mean?

RICHARD: Sure. It's too much trouble.

THE GIRL: Exactly.

RICHARD: I know just what you mean.

THE GIRL: That's right.

RICHARD: We both happen to be in positions where we can't possibly let ourselves get involved in anything. . . .

THE GIRL: Mmm.

RICHARD: All the damn phone calls and taxis and everything.

THE GIRL: That's right. I mean I certainly wouldn't be sitting alone with some man in his apartment at eleven-thirty at night if he wasn't married.

RICHARD: Certainly not. (*Pause.*) When you said about the producer—it would depend on if he were handsome—what did you mean by that? I mean, just out of curiosity . . . what would be your idea of handsome?

THE GIRL: Well, let's see. I really don't know. I suppose he should be tall—and kind of mature-looking . . .

RICHARD: Like me?

THE GIRL (*thoughtfully*): Mmmmm . . . (*Pause.*) You're not going to start falling desperately in love with me or anything, are you?

RICHARD: No. No. Definitely not. I mean I think you're very pretty and sweet and I certainly enjoyed having dinner with you. But . . .

THE GIRL: That's just the way I feel about you. You're very nice-looking and charming and mature. You're someone I can be with and count on him not falling desperately in love with me. . . .

RICHARD: That's right. I'm almost—well—I'm a lot older than you are. And one thing I've learned. Nothing is ever as

simple as you think it's going to be. You take the simplest damn thing and, before you know it, it gets all loused up. I don't know how it happens or why it happens but it always happens. . . .

THE GIRL: That's very true. You're absolutely right.

As the GIRL stops listening to RICHARD and gradually becomes absorbed in her own thoughts the lights dim to a single dream spot on her.

HER VOICE: Well, what do you think?

THE GIRL: Mmm . . .

HER VOICE: What do you mean—mmm?

THE GIRL: I mean—I don't know . . .

HER VOICE: That's ridiculous. What is there not to know? He certainly is nice—and he's mature without being—you know—decrepit or anything . . .

THE GIRL: He certainly seems well-preserved. . . .

HER VOICE: He's sweet and intelligent and married. What more do you want?

THE GIRL: I don't know.

HER VOICE: You're the one who wants to be the big-deal woman of the world. It's all your idea. It's not as if you were some kind of a virginal creature or something.

THE GIRL: Oh—shut up—I mean you make it sound so—so clinical. Besides, you certainly can't count Jerry . . .

HER VOICE: What do you mean we can't count Jerry?

THE GIRL: Well, I mean it was a big mistake—and it was so—so—and then he got all hysterical and wanted to marry me. . . .

HER VOICE: It counts.

THE GIRL: I mean you can understand a person wanting to find out something about life and everything before she gets married and all settled down and has to start getting in by one o'clock again. . . . Besides, what makes you think he's interested in me that way? I must seem like some kind of a juvenile delinquent to him. . . .

HER VOICE: You're twenty-two years old. And he's interested.

THE GIRL: How can you tell?

HER VOICE: I can tell. . . .

THE GIRL: How?

HER VOICE: I can tell. . . . What have you got to lose?

THE GIRL: Well, nothing, I guess—if you're really going to make Jerry count.

HER VOICE: He counts. . . .

THE GIRL: Well, then. . . .

The lights come back to normal. RICHARD is still talking, unaware that the GIRL's mind has been far away.

RICHARD: . . . what I'm trying to say is, that people who are really mature weigh things more carefully. They impose a discipline on themselves. They understand the cost. . . . I mean, they finally learn that sometimes something that seems very wonderful and desirable isn't really worth. . . . I mean—all the hysteria it's going to cause. . . . (*Pause*). Then, of course, you can overdo that line of thinking too. I mean a man—a person—anyone doesn't like to feel he's some kind of a vegetable or something. You know. What it amounts to is this: You've got to decide which is the most painful—doing something and regretting it—or not doing something and—regretting it. Do you see what I mean?

THE GIRL: I think so. . . .

RICHARD: I didn't mean to start making a speech. Look, are you sure you don't want a drink?

THE GIRL: No, thanks. Really.

Starts to go.

RICHARD: Now look, really. It's not late. You don't have to go yet. . . .

THE GIRL: I really should. . . .

RICHARD: Well, whatever you think. Let me take you up to your door. . . .

THE GIRL: No. That's all right. It's just upstairs. . . .

RICHARD: Well, all right. If you have to go.

THE GIRL: I want to thank you for the dinner. It was lovely. . . .

RICHARD: 'It was fun. . . .

THE GIRL: And for carrying that heavy plant all the way upstairs . . .

RICHARD: It wasn't so heavy. . . .

They have edged almost to the door by now.

THE GIRL: Well, good-night. And thanks—again . . .

RICHARD: Well, good-night . . . (*She leans forward and kisses him lightly on the cheek*). Well, good-night . . .

Suddenly they move together in a tight embrace which they hold for a moment. She breaks away, then kisses him again and in the same motion goes quickly out the door closing it behind her.

RICHARD is visibly shaken. He starts after her. Stops himself. Closes the door again. And locks it. He shakes his head and then puts on the chain lock.

Comes inside, starts for the phone, stops again. Tries to pull himself together. Picks up the galley sheets and sits down on the couch and tries to work on them.

As he sits, a square in the ceiling at the top of the stairs lifts out and a moment later the girl appears. She backs down the first few steps, lowering the floor-ceiling back into place. He is oblivious to this. She turns and starts down the stairs. We see that she is carrying a small claw hammer.

Quietly she comes down into the room. She looks at him and smiles. She pauses for a moment.

THE GIRL (*with a small, ineffectual wave of the hand*): Hi . . .

RICHARD almost jumps out of his skin. He sees her. After a moment he sees the hammer and realises where she has come from. Then, after a long time, he smiles and makes a similar, ineffectual wave of the hand.

RICHARD: Hi . . .

CURTAIN

ACT III

The same.

It is about eight o'clock the following morning. The blinds on the french doors are drawn, but outside the sun is shining brightly. It is going to be another hot day.

As the curtain rises, RICHARD stands by the french doors. He is in his shirt-sleeves. He opens the blinds and then the doors. He steps out on to the terrace and breathes deeply. He comes back into the living-room and notices the girl's shoes. Somewhat tentatively, he picks them up and carries them to the bedroom doors. He stops and listens a moment. He puts the shoes back where he found them and goes to the front door. He listens again, then unlocks the door without unfastening the chain.

He kneels down and reaching around through the slightly open door fishes in milk and the newspaper. He carries the paper down to the arm-chair and tries to read. He can't, however.

After a moment he looks up and speaks to himself in a very reassuring voice.

RICHARD: There's not a thing in the world to worry about. Two very attractive, intelligent people happened to meet under circumstances that seemed to be—propitious—and, well, it happened. It was very charming and gay. As a matter of fact it was wonderful. But now it's over.

He rises and starts for the bedroom.

We'll say good-bye, like two intelligent people. We'll have coffee . . .

He knocks gently on the door. He listens. He knocks again.

His calm is rapidly evaporating.

How can she possibly sleep like that?

What's the matter with her anyway? Maybe she's sick or something. Maybe she's dead.

Maybe the excitement was too much for her and she passed away in her sleep.

Oh, my God! That means the police. And the reporters. "Actress found dead in publisher's apartment!"

He looks desperately around. His eye lights on the staircase.

No. No. I'll just haul the body upstairs. That's all. Right back upstairs, nail up the floor again and that's all. They'd have no reason to suspect me. I'd wear gloves, of course. They'd never prove a thing.

Now stop it. You're getting hysterical again.

Pause.

Well, if she isn't dead, why the hell doesn't she just get up and go home? It's late! It's—late—it's *really* late—it's . . .

He picks up his wrist-watch from table.

. . . *ten after eight?* It seemed later than *that*. . . .

He is somewhat relieved by the time.

Well. I'll give her another half-hour to catch up on her beauty sleep. Then, I'll very politely wake her. We'll have coffee like two intelligent people. And then, I'll kiss her good-bye.

Confidently acting out the scene.

It's been fun, darling, but now, of course, it's over . . . No tears—no regrets . . .

He stands waving as if she were walking up the stairs.

Just good-bye. It's been—swell . . .

He blows a kiss upward, waves and then stands transfixed, a foolish expression on his face.

HIS VOICE: Pal.

RICHARD: Huh?

HIS VOICE: I don't want you to get upset or anything, but it might not be as easy as all that. You know. Be realistic.

RICHARD: What? What are you talking about?

HIS VOICE: I was just pointing out. Women don't take these things as lightly as men, you know. There *could* be complications. For example, suppose she's fallen desperately in love with you. . . .

RICHARD: She can't do that. It isn't fair. She knows she can't.

HIS VOICE: After all, pal, you had a little something to do with this yourself. . . .

RICHARD: Don't worry. I can handle it. Just don't worry. I can be tough if I have to. I can be pretty damn tough. If I set my mind to it, I can be a terrible heel. . . .

HIS VOICE (*mocking*): Ha-ha!

RICHARD: Shut up . . .

He stands for a moment, setting his mind to being a terrible heel. The lights dim and music sneaks in. "Dream lighting" lights up the bedroom doors. They open and the girl emerges. She is dressed like an illustration for a story called "Glorious Honey-moon" in The Woman's Home Companion. She is radiant.

THE GIRL (*radiantly*): Good morning, my darling . . . Good morning . . . Good morning . . .

RICHARD (*very tough. He lights a cigarette and stares at her for a moment through ice-blue eyes*): Oh. It's about time you dragged your dead pratt out of the sack. . . .

THE GIRL: Oh, darling, darling, darling . . . (*He exhales smoke*). What is it, my darling, you seem troubled . . .

RICHARD: Shut up, baby, and listen to me. I got something to tell you.

THE GIRL: And I've something to tell you. I've grown older, somehow, overnight. I know now that all our brave talk of independence—our not wanting to get involved—our being—actually—*afraid* of love—it was all childish nonsense. I'm not afraid to say it, darling. I love you. I want you. You belong to me.

RICHARD: Look, baby. Let's get one thing straight. I belong to nobody, see. If some dumb little dame wants to throw herself at me—that's her lookout, see. I'm strictly a one-night guy. I've left a string of broken hearts from here to—to Westport, Connecticut, and back. Now, the smartest little move you could make is to pack your stuff and scam. . . .

THE GIRL: Go? Not!! Not now! Not ever! Don't you see, my darling, after what we've been to each other . . .

RICHARD: I spell trouble, baby, with a capital "T". We're poison to each other—you and me. Don't you see that?

THE GIRL: When two people care for each other as we do . . .

RICHARD (*a little "PAL JOEY" creeping in*): What do I care

for a dame? Every damn dame is the same. I'm going to own a night club. . . .

THE GIRL: That doesn't matter. Nothing matters. This thing is bigger than both of us. We'll *flaunt* our love. Shout it from the highest housetops. We're on a great toboggan. We can't stop it. We can't steer it. It's too late to run, the Beguine has begun. . . .

RICHARD (*weakly*): Oh, Jesus Christ. . . .

THE GIRL (*coolly taking charge*): Now then. Do you want to be the one to tell Helen, or shall I?

RICHARD (*with an anguished moan*): Tell Helen?

THE GIRL: Of course. We must. It's the only way. . . .

RICHARD: No, no, no! You can't do that! You can't!

He is now kneeling at her feet, pleading. She puts her arm about his shoulder. From somewhere comes the brave sound of a solo violin which plays behind her next speech.

THE GIRL: We can and we must. We'll face her together. Hand in hand. Proudly. Our heads held high. Oh, we'll be social outcasts, but we won't care. It'll be you and I together against the world. I'll go and dress now, darling. But I wanted you to know how I felt. I couldn't wait to tell you. Good-bye, for now, my darling. I won't be long. . . .

As the music swells, she floats off into the bedroom, waving and blowing kisses with both hands. The "dream light" fades out and the lighting returns to normal. RICHARD stands panic-stricken in the middle of the living-room floor. He shakes his head.

RICHARD: I'm crazy. I'm going crazy. That's all. I've run amok. Helen goes away and I run amok. Raping and looting and . . . (*He notices the cigarette in his hand*) smoking cigarettes. . . .

He quickly puts out the cigarette.

What have I done? What did I think I was doing? What did I possibly think I was doing?

Damn it! I begged Helen not to go away for the summer. I begged her!

What am I going to do! That girl in there undoubtedly expects me to get a divorce and marry her.

HIS VOICE: Well, why don't you?

RICHARD: Are you kidding? What about Helen?

HIS VOICE: What about her. Maybe this is all for the best. Maybe this is the best thing that could have happened to you. After all, Helen's not as young as she used to be. In a couple of years you'll look like her son.

RICHARD: Now wait a minute. Wait a minute. Helen is still pretty attractive. She happens to be a damn beautiful woman, if you want to know. And we've been through a lot together. The time I was fired from Random House. And when little Ricky was sick—and I caught the damn mumps from him. She's taken a lot of punishment from me, if you want to know. And she's been pretty nice about it . . .

HIS VOICE: The point, however is: Do you love her?

RICHARD: Love her? Well, sure. Sure, I love her. Of course I love her. I'm *used to her!*

HIS VOICE: Used to her? That doesn't sound very exciting. Of course I imagine when a man enters middle life, he doesn't want someone exciting. He wants someone comfortable. Someone he's *used to* . . .

RICHARD: Now, just a second. You've got the wrong idea. Helen's not so—*comfortable*. She's pretty exciting. You should see the way people look at her at parties and on the street and everywhere. . . .

HIS VOICE: What people?

RICHARD: Men. That's what people. For instance, Tom MacKenzie, if you want to know. When Helen wears that green dress—the backless one with hardly any front—there's nothing comfortable about that at all . . .

RICHARD *sinks into chair and leans back.*

She wore it one night last spring when Tom MacKenzie was over—and you just couldn't get him out of here. . . .

Music sneaks in and the lights dim. "Dream Lighting" fills the stage.

It looked like he was going to go home about four different times but he just couldn't tear himself away . . .

TOM and HELEN *appear*. HELEN *is wearing the green dress. It is everything* RICHARD *has said it is.*

TOM: Helen, you look particularly lovely tonight. . . .

HELEN: Why, thank you, Tom . . .

TOM: You're a lucky boy, Dickie, even if you don't know it.

RICHARD: I know all about it and don't call me Dickie. . . .

TOM: Helen—Helen, that name is so like you. "Helen, thy beauty is to me as those Nicaean barks of yore" . . .

HELEN: Gracious . . .

TOM: No, no, I mean it. Stand there a moment. Let me drink you in. Turn around. Slowly, that's it . . . (HELEN *models dress*). You look particularly lovely in a backless gown . . .

RICHARD (*muttering*): Backless, frontless, topless, bottomless, I'm on to you, you son of a bitch . . .

TOM (*from across the room*): What was that, old man?

HELEN (*quickly*): Don't pay any attention to Dick. You know what happens to him and martinis. . . .

RICHARD: Two martinis. Two lousy martinis.

HELEN: Dr. Summers has told him time and time again that he should go on the wagon for a while till his stomach gets better. . . .

TOM: That's good advice, Dick. When a man can't handle the stuff he should leave it alone completely. That's what I say. Once a year—just to test my will power—I stop everything.

RICHARD (*he starts to say something, but finally stops himself*): No comment.

HELEN (*leaping once again into the breach*): You really like this dress—do you, Tom?

TOM: I certainly do. It's a Potter original, isn't it?

HELEN: Yes—but that's wonderful! How did you know?

TOM: I'm a bit of an authority on women's clothes. You should really take me with you the next time you go shopping. We could have a bite of lunch first and really make a day of it. . . .

He has finally got to the door.

Good-night, Dick . . .

RICHARD waves unenthusiastically.

Good-night, Helen . . .

He kisses her.

HELEN: Good-night, Tom . . .

TOM: I'll call you one day next week. . . .

HELEN: I'll be looking forward to it. (*She closes the door behind him.*) I thought he was never going home . . .

RICHARD (*in rather feeble imitation of TOM*): "Helen, thy beauty is to me as those Nicaean barks of yore"—he is kidding?

HELEN: You know Tom. He beats his chest and makes noises but it doesn't really mean anything. . . .

RICHARD: I know. His Nicaean bark is worse than his Nicaean bite. . . . (*He is pleasantly surprised by how well this came out.*) Hey, that's pretty good. That came out better than I thought it was going to. Nicaean bark—Nicaean bite . . .

HELEN (*unfractured*): Actually, in some ways, Tom is very sweet. I mean it's nice to have people notice your clothes. . . .

RICHARD: Notice your clothes! He did a lot more than notice. . . . He practically . . . You know, you really ought to do something about that dress. Just the front part there . . .

HELEN: Do something about it?

RICHARD: I mean sort of . . . (*He gestures ineffectually about raising or tightening or something the front.*) I don't know. Maybe we ought to empty the ash-trays or something. You should see the way he was looking at you . . .

HELEN: You should have been flattered. Don't you want people to think your wife is attractive?

RICHARD: Sure, but . . . Why don't we clean this place up a little? It looks like a cocktail lounge on West Tenth Street. . . .

He picks up an ash-tray full of cigarette butts.

HELEN comes over to him.

HELEN: Darling . . .

RICHARD: We ought to at least empty the ash-trays . . .

HELEN: Not now . . .

RICHARD (*looks at her questioningly*): Huh?

HELEN: I mean not now . . .

He looks at her for another moment and then very casually tosses away the tray full of butts and takes her in his arms.

The lights black out and the music swells in the darkness.

When the lights come on again the lighting is back to normal

and RICHARD is leaning back in the chair where we left him, a self-satisfied grin on his face.

HIS VOICE: Then you really do love Helen?

RICHARD: What do you want—an affidavit?

HIS VOICE: Well, good. So that leaves you with only one problem. I'm warning you, pal, it may not be as easy to get rid of this girl as you think.

RICHARD: Huh?

HIS VOICE: My dear boy, did you ever hear of a thing called blackmail?

RICHARD: *Blackmail?*

HIS VOICE: One often hears of unscrupulous young girls who prey on foolish, wealthy, middle-aged men. . . .

RICHARD: Now, really. . . .

HIS VOICE: You got her into bed without any great effort. Why do you suppose she was so willing?

RICHARD (*weakly*): But she said—she told me—she went on record—she didn't want to get involved. . . . (HIS VOICE *laughs coarsely*). A minute ago you were saying she was madly in love with me. . . .

HIS VOICE: *You poor, foolish, wealthy, middle-aged man.*

RICHARD: Wait a minute—in the first place I'm not wealthy. . . .

HIS VOICE: Blackmail, pal, it happens every day. She'll bleed you white.

RICHARD: Oh, my God. I'll have to sell the kid's bonds. . . . Poor Ricky. Poor Helen. There's only one thing to do. Confess everything and throw myself on her mercy. We're both intelligent people. She'll forgive me.

HIS VOICE: I wouldn't be a bit surprised if she shot you dead.

RICHARD: You're out of your mind. Not Helen. If she shot anyone it would much more likely be herself. Oh, my God. She'd probably shoot us both. . . . I can't go on torturing myself like this. I'll have to tell her. Oh, she'll be hurt. For a while. But she'll get over it. There's no other way. I've got to tell her and take my chances. . . .

Music and "dream lighting" in.

RICHARD (*calling*): Helen! Helen!

HELEN (*from kitchen*): Yes, darling . . .

RICHARD: Can you come in here a moment, please? There's something I must tell you.

HELEN *enters from the kitchen. This is the domestic, very un-green-dress HELEN. She wears an apron and carries a bowl which she stirs with a wooden spoon.*

HELEN (*sweetly*): Yes, Dick? I was just making a cherry pie. I know how you hate the pies from Gristede's and I wanted to surprise you. . . .

RICHARD: I don't know how to say this to you. . . .

HELEN: Yes, Dick?

RICHARD: We've been married a long time. . . .

HELEN: Seven years, darling. Seven glorious years. These are sweetheart cherries . . .

RICHARD: And in all that time, I've never looked at another woman. . . .

HELEN: I know that, Dick. And I want to tell you what it's meant to me. You may not know this, darling, but you're terribly attractive to women. . . .

RICHARD: I am?

HELEN: Yes, you funny Richard you—you are. But in all those seven years I've never once worried. Oh, don't I know there are plenty of women who would give their eye teeth to get you. Elaine. Miss Morris. That Marie Whatever-her-name-was up in Westport. But I trust you, Dick. I always have. I always will. Do you know something?

RICHARD: What?

HELEN: I . . . Oh, I can't even say it. It's too foolish. . . .

RICHARD: Go ahead. Go ahead, say it. Be foolish.

HELEN: Well—I honestly believe that if you were ever unfaithful to me—I'd know it. I'd know it instantly.

RICHARD: You would?

HELEN: Oh, yes . . .

RICHARD: How?

HELEN: Wives have ways. Little ways.

RICHARD: And what would you do?

HELEN: Oh, darling, don't be . . .

RICHARD: No. Really. I'm interested. What would you do?

HELEN: Oh, I think I'd probably shoot you dead. Afterwards, of course, I'd shoot myself. Life wouldn't be worth living after that. . . .

RICHARD: Oh, no!

A pause.

Helen . . .

HELEN: Yes?

RICHARD: Nothing. Nothing.

HELEN: Yes, there is something. I can tell.

RICHARD: No, now take it easy . . .

HELEN: I can tell. I can suddenly feel it. The vibrations—something happened while I was away this summer . . .

RICHARD: It was an accident. A crazy accident. There was this tomato . . . That is—this tomato plant fell down. It landed right out there on the terrace. But nobody was hurt, thank God. I didn't want to tell you about it. I was afraid you'd worry. . . .

HELEN (*sadly*): Who was she?

RICHARD: Now, Helen—you're making this up . . .

HELEN (*turning on him*): *Who was she!*

RICHARD: Now please, really . . .

HELEN: Then it's true. It is true.

RICHARD: Look, we're both intelligent people. I know you'd be hurt. But I know that somehow, some day, you'll forgive me. . . . (*He suddenly notices that HELEN is holding a revolver in her hand.*) Now put that thing down. What are you going to do?

HELEN: You've left me nothing else to do. I'm going to shoot you dead. Then I'm going to kill myself.

RICHARD: But what about—the child?

HELEN: You should have thought of that before. Good-bye, Richard . . .

She fires five times.

For a moment, RICHARD stands erect, weathering the hail of bullets. . . . Then slowly, tragically, in the best gangster movie

tradition—clutching his middle—and making small Bogart-like sounds he sinks to the floor.

RICHARD (*gasping—the beads of sweat standing out on his forehead*): Helen—I'm—going—fast . . . Give me a cigarette. . . .

HELEN (*always the wife, even in times of crisis*): A cigarette! You know what Dr. Murphy told you about smoking!

RICHARD: Good-bye . . . Helen . . .

She turns and walks sadly to the kitchen. At the door she stops, waves sadly with the wooden spoon, blows one final kiss and as the music swells she exits into kitchen. An instant later we hear the final shot.

RICHARD *collapses in a final spasm of agony and the lights black out.*

As the lights dim back to reality RICHARD is seated where we left him, a horror-struck expression on his face.

RICHARD: Oh, the hell with *that!* I'll be goddamned if I'll tell her! (*For a moment, RICHARD stands shaking his head.*) But I've got to . . . I've just got to . . .

He is heading for the telephone when the sound of the door, buzzer stops him.

He freezes, panic-stricken. Glances quickly at the bedroom. The buzzer sounds again. Then a third time.

When it is quite clear that whoever it is is not going to go away RICHARD presses the buzzer, then opens the door a crack, still leaving the chain fastened.

RICHARD (*hoarsely*): Who is it?

DR. BRUBAKER (*off-stage*): Once again, sir, I must trouble you . . .

RICHARD: Dr. Brubaker!

DR. BRUBAKER (*off-stage*): Yes . . .

RICHARD: What is it? What can I do for you?

DR. BRUBAKER (*through door*): Last evening, after our conference, I appear to have left your apartment without my briefcase.

RICHARD: No, no, Doctor. That's impossible. I'm afraid you're mistaken. I'm quite sure you had it with you. In fact, I remember quite clearly seeing . . .

He looks wildly around the room and then sees the brief-case.

Oh. Oh, there it is. . . . You're right. Isn't that amazing? It's right there. I'm sorry I can't ask you in but the place is kind of a mess and . . .

He is trying to get the brief-case through the door without unfastening the chain. It doesn't fit. He attempts brute force, but it just isn't going to fit. He pounds at it wildly and then finally realises that he is going to have to open the chain. He does so.

Here you are, Doctor . . . Good-bye . . .

DR. BRUBAKER (*an unstoppable force, he moves into the living-room*): I thank you. If you will permit me, I'll just make sure that everything is in order . . .

Opening the brief-case and riffling through the contents.

You can see what a strong unconscious resistance this whole project has stimulated in me. . . . I can't understand this mass compulsion on the part of the psychiatric profession to write and publish books. . . .

RICHARD: Don't worry about it, Doctor. Books by psychiatrists almost always sell well. I'll talk to you again the first of the week. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: Thank you, sir. And once again I must apologise for troubling you. Particularly in the midst of such a delicate situation . . .

RICHARD: Yes. Well . . . *What?* What do you mean? What delicate situation?

DR. BRUBAKER: I meant only that, as, quite clearly, your second assault on the person of the young lady was more successful than the first, my visit could not have been more inopportune. Good-bye, sir, and good luck!

DR. BRUBAKER *starts to go*. RICHARD *stops him*.

RICHARD: Now wait a minute, Doctor. Now wait a minute. You can't just say something like that and then go . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: My boy, I have a full day ahead of me. . . .

RICHARD: Look, I can't stand it. You've got to tell me. How did you know—about—what happened?

DR. BRUBAKER: In the light of our conversation of last evening, it is quite obvious. I return this morning to find you behind

barred doors in an extreme state of sexomasochistic excitement bordering on hysteria. . . .

RICHARD: What the hell is sexomasochistic excitement?

DR. BRUBAKER: Guilt feelings, sir. Guilt feelings. A state of deep and utter enjoyment induced by revelling in one's guilt feelings. One punishes oneself and one is pardoned of one's crime. And now, my boy, I must really go. Enjoy yourself!

RICHARD: Look, this may not seem very much to you—you spend eight hours a day with rapists and all kinds of—but I've never done anything like this before. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: This is quite obvious.

RICHARD: This is the first time. And, by God, it's the last time. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: An excellent decision.

RICHARD: I mean, I love my wifel

DR. BRUBAKER: Don't we all? And now, sir . . .

RICHARD: If she ever finds out about this she'll—kill us both. She'll kill *herself* anyway—and I don't want her to do that. Maybe it would be better if I didn't tell her. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: Possibly . . .

RICHARD: But she'd find out some way. I know she would. What was that you said the other night? There was some phrase you used. What was it?

DR. BRUBAKER (*he has wandered over to the bookshelf and taken down the copy of US Camera*): Vigorous denial. This popular theory of the omniscience of wives is completely untrue. They almost never know. Because they don't want to.

RICHARD: Yeah. Yeah. Vigorous denial. Suppose I denied it. That's all. She'd have to take my word for it. As a matter of fact, you know, it's probably a damn good thing this happened. I mean, a couple of days ago—I wasn't even sure if I did love her. Now I know I do. Helen ought to be damn glad this happened, if you want to know . . . (*He notices DR. BRUBAKER holding US Camera*). You can take that with you if you want to . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: No. No, thank you.

RICHARD: You know, suddenly I feel much better. Every-

thing's going to be all right. You're absolutely right, Doctor. I just won't tell her and everything'll be fine. And if she should find out, I'll deny it. . . .

DR. BRUBAKER: Vigorously.

RICHARD: Gee, Doctor—I'd like to give you fifty dollars or something . . .

DR. BRUBAKER (*considers this briefly, but rejects it*): Well . . . No, no. It will not be necessary . . .

He is casually thumbing through US Camera and stops at the GIRL's picture.

However, if the young lady should by any chance suffer any severe traumatic or emotional disturbances due to your decision to go back to your wife . . . If, in other words, she appears to be in need of psychiatric aid—I trust you will mention my name. . . . Thank you once again, sir, and good day . . .

He hands US Camera back to RICHARD and exits. RICHARD looks after him thoughtfully for a moment or two. Then, the doors to the bedrooms slide open and THE GIRL emerges. She is dressed and is bright and cheerful and very much herself.

THE GIRL: Hi.

RICHARD: Oh. Hi.

THE GIRL: Golly, I didn't know it was so late. I don't know what happened to me. I've got to be at the studio in half an hour. . . .

RICHARD: The studio . . .

THE GIRL: Sure. The television show. Forty million people are waiting to see me wash my husband's shirt in Trill—that exciting new, no-rinse detergent . . .

RICHARD: Oh.

THE GIRL: Well, I'd better go now. . . .

RICHARD: I was going to make some coffee. . . .

THE GIRL: That's all right. I'll get some on the way.

RICHARD: I don't know how to say this—but you're . . . I mean, I . . .

THE GIRL: I know. Me too . . .

RICHARD: Will I see you—again, I mean?

THE GIRL: I think better not . . .

RICHARD: This whole thing—it's been swell. Only . . .

THE GIRL: Only one thing. We mustn't forget that . . .

RICHARD: What's that?

THE GIRL: This is your birthday.

RICHARD: Gee, that's right. It is.

THE GIRL: Well, I want this to be a happy birthday. . . .

RICHARD: Look. You're not upset about anything, are you?

THE GIRL: No. No, I feel fine. Are you?

RICHARD: Are you sure? I mean, well . . .

THE GIRL: No, really, I feel wonderful. . . . Only . . . Well, suddenly I feel like maybe it wouldn't be so bad to have to start getting in at one o'clock again. . . .

RICHARD: Didn't you say—I mean—wouldn't that spoil everything?

THE GIRL: You don't understand—I mean it would be pretty nice to have to start getting in at one o'clock again. As soon as I find someone who's fallen desperately in love with me—someone who's sweet and intelligent and married—to me . . . I don't mean you—I mean—you know—someone who . . .

RICHARD: Someone who never saw Sarah Bernhardt?

THE GIRL: Well, yes . . . Good-bye, and thanks for everything. . . . *(She kisses him lightly on the cheek.)* Birthday kiss. Happy birthday, Richard.

RICHARD: Thank you . . .

She starts up the stairs then turns and stops.

THE GIRL: Hey—I forgot my hammer.

RICHARD: Yeah—you better take that . . .

Both laugh and are released. She goes up the stairs. The trap closes and she is gone.

RICHARD is a little awed. In a dazed way he wanders over to the bar and pours himself a glass of milk. Then, he looks at his watch, pulls himself together, picks up US Camera and heads for bedroom. He puts US Camera on shelf, starts out. Comes back and drops it behind the row of books, biding it. He starts out again and the door buzzer sounds. He goes to the door and opens it. TOM MACKENZIE is standing in the doorway.

TOM: Hi, there . . .

RICHARD: Hello.

TOM: How are you? Hope I didn't wake you . . .

RICHARD: What do you want?

TOM: I'm sorry to bust in on you at this ungodly hour, boy, but I'm here on business. Family business. Got any coffee?

RICHARD: No. What are you doing here? I thought you were up in the country.

TOM: I was. I just drove in this morning. Got an appointment with my agent so Helen asked me to stop by and ask you . . .

RICHARD: Oh! Oh, she did. Well, I'm damn glad she did. I want to talk to you.

TOM: What's the matter with you, boy? You're acting mighty peculiar.

RICHARD: Never mind how *I'm* acting. You think you're pretty fancy with your rain and your damn fireplaces . . .

TOM: What are you talking about? What fireplaces?

RICHARD: You know what fireplaces.

TOM: I don't even have a fireplace.

RICHARD: That's your story.

TOM: I put in radiant heat. It's the latest thing. Cost me three thousand dollars.

RICHARD: Oh, yeah?

TOM: Yeah! They take the coils and they bury them right in the floor. . . . What the hell is all this about fireplaces? Are you drunk or something?

RICHARD: No, I am not drunk! (*From above comes the sound of hammering, a nail being driven into the floor.*) She had dinner with you last night, didn't she?

TOM: Sure. Sure. (*More hammering.*) What's wrong with that?

RICHARD: And she was wearing that green dress from Clare Potter wasn't she?

TOM: How the hell do I know where she bought that green dress?

RICHARD: Oh, then she *was* wearing it! Worse than I thought!

TOM: You *are* drunk. (*More hammering. This time TOM looks up.*) What's that?

RICHARD: That's nothing. This used to be a duplex. I just had a glass of milk!

TOM (*patiently*): Now see here, old man. Why shouldn't Helen have dinner with me? She's stuck up there in the country while you're down here doing God knows what . . .

RICHARD: What do you mean by that?

TOM: I know what happens with guys like you when their wives are away. Don't forget, I used to be married myself.

RICHARD: I got a good mind to punch you right in the nose.

TOM: Why?

RICHARD: Why—because you're too old—that's why!

TOM: Too old—what are you talking about?

RICHARD: You're getting fat—you look like the portrait of Dorian Gray!

TOM: Drunk. Blind, stinking drunk at nine o'clock in the morning. Where am I getting fat?

RICHARD: Everywhere! You know, there's something really repulsive about old men who run after young wives! Now you get out of here and get back to Helen and tell her I refuse to give her a divorce. . . .

TOM: *A divorce?*

RICHARD: You heard me! You can tell her for me that I'll fight it in every court in the country!

TOM: You're crazy! Helen doesn't want a divorce. . . . (*Yelling, because he can no longer control himself.*) She wants her yellow skirt!

RICHARD: Her yellow skirt? Oh, my God . . .

TOM (*bellowing*): She's having people over for dinner and she needs it!

He exits slamming the door furiously.

RICHARD: Her yellow skirt . . .

He reaches into ball closet and finds it on the wire hanger.

Tenderly, he folds it over his arm.

I'll take her yellow skirt up to her myself. She needs it. She's having people over for dinner.

ACT III

THE SEVEN YEAR ITCH

People over for dinner? *What* people?

Mel That's what people!

*Takes his hat from closet, puts it on his head at a rakish angle
and with a great flourish exits out the door as:*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

